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1. Sugar chest, Davidson County, Tennessee, 1790–1810. Cherry with walnut cockbeading; tulip poplar secondary. HOA  $37\frac{7}{8}$ ", WOA  $27\frac{1}{2}$ ", DOA  $18\frac{7}{8}$ ". MRF S-11656.

# “That Article of Household Furniture Peculiar to Earlier Days in the South”

Sugar Chests in Middle Tennessee and  
Central Kentucky, 1800–1835

ANNE S. MCPHERSON

DURING THE FIRST THIRD of the nineteenth century, the sugar chest (fig. 1) became a relatively common piece of furniture in parts of Tennessee and Kentucky among people of the upper and upper-middle class. While regional preferences may have given way to a national aesthetic in urban and coastal areas in the early nineteenth century, they were slower to be supplanted in areas less accessible to the national market. This study examines the regional development of sugar chests and related forms, along with the factors that brought about this development and that ultimately caused these forms to become outmoded.<sup>1</sup>

## SUGAR USE AND STORAGE

Sugar as a commodity held great symbolic importance for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Americans. Its high cost, relative scarcity, and importance in dietary and entertainment customs resulted in a perceived need to safeguard it. Among the elite in Middle Tennessee and Central Kentucky, inaccessibility to the market,



2. Bottle case, Roanoke River Basin, North Carolina, 1790–1810. Walnut; yellow pine secondary. HOA 40 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", WOA 25 $\frac{1}{8}$ ", DOA 15 $\frac{1}{8}$ ", MRF S-4434.

household size, and wealth created a unique set of circumstances that generated both the need and the ability to purchase and consequently to store large quantities of sugar during this period. During the late eighteenth century, artisans responded to the needs of their patrons by developing a type of furniture to store a household's supply of sugar, the sugar chest. The most common form outwardly resembles a bottle case or cellaret (fig. 2). However, a bottle case was partitioned to hold twelve to sixteen bottles, and a sugar chest typically was divided into two or three compartments for storing different types of sugar and coffee. Many variations of the basic form exist, including sugar desks, sugar cases, sugar stands, sugar bureaux, sugar presses, and sideboard sugar chests.

As sugar became more affordable and more available on a regular basis, the need for safeguarding and storing large quantities of it declined, at least in urban areas. While sugar chests and related forms continued to be made and used in some households throughout the 1840s, by that time they had ceased to be used in elite urban households.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as the urban elite became more conscious of prevailing styles in other parts of the country and as their dining rooms grew increasingly specialized, the sugar chest became an outmoded article of furniture.

While the need for a discrete form of furniture in which to store



large quantities of sugar is difficult to understand today when sugar is relatively inexpensive, plentiful, and already included in many foodstuffs, sugar historically had been kept under lock and key. When Middle Tennesseans and Central Kentuckians elected to store their sugar in a locked case, they were responding to a tradition that dates back to the Middle Ages when sugar was extremely rare and expensive.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, its relative scarcity and value transformed it into a symbol of power and wealth. Once sugar was introduced to Europe around 1000 A.D., its use spread slowly and gradually through society, from royalty through the ranks of the nobility and eventually to the middle classes. By the end of the eighteenth century, hot sweetened tea formed an important part of the daily caloric intake of the English working class. Sugar not only sweetened both tea and coffee, but was a fundamental ingredient of many foods served with tea. Consumption of pastries and puddings became widespread, and dessert became an expected course at lunch and dinner in the period from 1750 to 1850. Sugar also was increasingly used as a preservative for fruits.<sup>4</sup> As sugar usage spread to all classes of society, sugar became less a symbol of power, although the ability to purchase quantities of sugar, particularly white sugar, conveyed a message of wealth and a sense of status.<sup>5</sup>

Both the seasonal availability of sugar and the high prices it commanded contributed to the value that was placed on sugar in this area of the southern Backcountry in the early nineteenth century. Loaf sugar and brown sugar were expensive items in Middle Tennessee in the early years of the nineteenth century. In 1811, white or loaf sugar cost between 42 and 50 cents per pound and brown sugar around 20 cents per pound at the Winchester and Cage General Merchandise Store in Sumner County, Tennessee.<sup>6</sup> Molasses and maple sugar were potential alternative sweeteners. However, molasses had a strong taste and did not substitute well for sugar in certain foods and beverages.<sup>7</sup> Maple sugar, called homemade or "Kentucky sugar," sold for 12½ cents per pound at the Winchester and Cage Store in 1811, but as the Frenchman François André Michaux

noted, "Only the poorer class of inhabitants [used] maple sugar."<sup>8</sup> By 1824, the prices had dropped so that white sugar could be purchased for around 35 cents per pound and brown sugar (depending upon its quality) for between 12½ and 14½ cents per pound.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, these commodities were not always available in the first two decades of the century. Sugar was shipped to Middle Tennessee from New Orleans up the Mississippi River to the mouth of the Ohio River, and from the Ohio River to the Cumberland River, which ran through northern Middle Tennessee. Until the advent of steamships, the amount of time required to ship goods from Louisville, Kentucky—located on the Ohio River—to New Orleans was about twenty-eight days, while the return trip upriver required ninety days.<sup>10</sup> Because of the long transport time, the barges and keelboats that plied this route made only one round trip per year. Boats laden with tobacco and cotton typically departed from Nashville in December and returned in May with goods from New Orleans.<sup>11</sup> Supplies that reached stores in Middle Tennessee in the late spring were not replenished until the following year; consequently, a store's supply of sugar frequently was depleted by late summer. Steamships began to operate along the Mississippi River during the late 1810s, but it was not until 1819 that the first steamship, the *General Jackson*, arrived in Nashville.<sup>12</sup> Steamships considerably lessened the travel time; the trip downriver from Louisville to New Orleans took only twelve days, and the trip upriver from New Orleans to Louisville only thirty-six days "when their machinery [did] not meet with an accident."<sup>13</sup> The shorter transport time not only resulted in a decrease in the price of sugar, but also permitted more than one round trip to be made per year. Thus, by 1819, sugar shipments began to arrive in Nashville in the fall of the year as well as the spring.

The irregular availability of sugar before the advent of steamboats, in conjunction with a tendency during this era to buy supplies in bulk, resulted in large-volume purchases of sugar when it was available.<sup>14</sup> Widow's allotments of the period provide evidence not only of the importance of sugar but also of the quantities of brown sugar

and loaf sugar needed on a yearly basis. In 1822, the yearly provisions awarded by the Davidson County (Tennessee) Court to the widow Sarah Owen included 125 pounds of brown sugar, 30 pounds of coffee, and 10 pounds of loaf sugar.<sup>15</sup> Large plantation households like those found in Central Kentucky and Middle Tennessee clearly required more sugar than smaller households with fewer or no slaves. While the procedure for doling out rations to slaves varied, one former slave from Campbell County, Tennessee, who was interviewed in the 1930s recounted that she had received provisions, including brown sugar, on a weekly basis.<sup>16</sup> Even if sugar was only distributed to slaves on special occasions such as Christmas, the number of slaves in a household increased the amount of sugar required to operate it. The combination of geographic isolation, wealth, and large plantation households thus created an environment where sugar was purchased in large quantities. Its symbolic and monetary value created the need for safe storage of the commodity among those who could afford to purchase it in large quantities.

#### REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF SUGAR CHESTS

A brief article in a 1929 issue of *The Magazine ANTIQUES* described the sugar chest as “that article of household furniture peculiar to earlier days in the South.”<sup>17</sup> While sugar chests are not common to the entire South, they are occasionally found throughout a significant portion of the southern Backcountry. Parts of Tennessee and Kentucky form the concentrated area in which sugar chests were made and used (see figure 3). The authors of *The Art and Mystery of Tennessee Furniture* suggest imagining a large topographical oval extending from the Appalachian Mountains in the east, the northern border of the Tennessee River in Alabama to the south, the Mississippi River to the west, and the Ohio River to the north. They argue that the primary area of sugar chest production falls within this oval.<sup>18</sup> Even within this oval, however, there are areas in which few sugar chests can be documented.



3. Map of Kentucky and Tennessee. Engraved by Fenner Sears & Co., London, c. 1840. *Private collection.*

In addition to Kentucky and Tennessee, sugar chests have been attributed to North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Missouri, Ohio, and Indiana.<sup>19</sup> Since little scholarly research in material culture has been conducted in some of these states, most attributions have been based upon where sugar chests have been found in the twentieth century. However, the areas of these states in which sugar chests were produced appear to be those that border Tennessee and Kentucky. The form appears to have first occurred in Middle Tennessee and Central Kentucky at

the end of the eighteenth century and to have spread outward from those areas.

The daybook of John C. Burgner of Waynesville, North Carolina, records that his cabinet shop made one sugar chest in 1829 and two in 1830.<sup>20</sup> A small number of sugar chests with local histories have been found in western North Carolina and in western piedmont Virginia along the North Carolina border.<sup>21</sup> The sugar chest illustrated in figure 4 has a history of ownership in piedmont Virginia, while the sugar chest or case in figure 5 was probably made in piedmont South Carolina. A few sugar chests have also been located in northern Georgia. Figure 6 is catalogued as a cellaret in *Furniture of the Georgia Piedmont Before 1830*, but its internal partitioning into one



4. Sugar chest, piedmont Virginia, 1810–1825. Walnut; tulip poplar and yellow pine secondary. HOA 32¼", WOA 28¾", DOA 17¼". MRF S-21504.



5. Sugar chest or case, piedmont South Carolina, 1800–1820. Walnut; yellow pine secondary. HOA 35 $\frac{1}{8}$ ", WOA 19 $\frac{3}{8}$ ", DOA 14". *Collection of the Charleston Museum, Acc. HF 319.*

large and two small compartments follows the plan of a sugar chest rather than that of a bottle case.<sup>22</sup> *Neat Pieces: The Plain Style Furniture of Nineteenth Century Georgia* notes the relatively rare occurrence of sugar chests in Georgia.<sup>23</sup>

Sugar chests appear to have been relatively common in northern Alabama. The cabinetmaker James R. Patterson moved from Nashville to Limestone County, Alabama, sometime after 1820. The inventory taken of his estate in 1826 listed one finished and four unfinished sugar chests.<sup>24</sup> In the course of fieldwork conducted by the Birmingham Museum of Art, eleven sugar chests were recorded, most with histories in Lawrence, Limestone, and Madison counties, all located along the Tennessee River.<sup>25</sup> At least two sugar chests have been attributed to Natchez, Mississippi, based upon local history of the pieces.<sup>26</sup> The presence of sugar chests in Alabama and Mississippi may be explained in part by the absentee ownership of plantations in northern Alabama and Mississippi by Middle Tennesseans as well as out-migration from Middle Tennessee to Alabama and Mississippi.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, northern Alabama was settled principally by Tennesseans.<sup>28</sup>

While sugar chests may be found today in Louisiana, both field and probate research reveal a dearth of the form during the period.<sup>29</sup> Presumably sugar production in Louisiana created a situation of ready availability and relative affordability of the commodity, making sugar chests unnecessary there.

While the authors of *Arkansas Made* discuss the existence of sugar chests in Arkansas, they record no examples. They attribute the scarcity of sugar chests, cellarets, and sideboards to the relatively impoverished population of the state.<sup>30</sup> In the course of her work on Ohio furniture makers, Jane Sikes Hageman did not attribute any sugar chests to Ohio. However, she located at least two references to sugar chests, one in a cabinetmaker's account book and one in a will.<sup>31</sup> Betty Lawson Walters found one probate reference to a sugar desk and none to sugar chests in her review of Indiana records.<sup>32</sup>



6. Sugar chest or stand, piedmont Georgia, 1800–1815. Walnut with light wood inlay; yellow pine back and partitions, oak bottom. HOA 23 $\frac{3}{8}$ ", WOA 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", DOA 14 $\frac{5}{8}$ ". MRF S-6415.



The vast majority of sugar chests and related forms are from Tennessee and Kentucky, the states forming the center of the large topographical oval envisioned above.<sup>43</sup> Even within Tennessee and Kentucky, however, there were areas in which the sugar chest was not a prevalent form. A comparison of the areas in which the form proliferated with areas in which it did not reveals that variations in its frequency of occurrence seem to relate to wealth, time of settlement, market accessibility, existence of a plantation economy, and the dissemination of style.

The settlement patterns and the geography easily divide Tennessee into three Grand Divisions—East Tennessee, which reaches to the Cumberland Mountains; Middle Tennessee, which reaches westward to the Tennessee River; and West Tennessee, which is bounded on the west by the Mississippi River. There is a general dearth of sugar chests in East Tennessee, where a plantation economy never developed as it did in Middle and later West Tennessee. A review of estate records from four East Tennessee counties produced many references to sugar boxes, but only one reference to a sugar chest before 1835.<sup>44</sup> Elihu Embree of Washington County did own a sugar chest at the time of his death in 1820.<sup>45</sup> Knox County was the most populous county in East Tennessee during the nineteenth century. The estate records of Knox County, however, list only one sugar chest prior to 1840.<sup>46</sup> Greene County had a strong cabinetmaking tradition, but neither sugar chests attributable to this county nor inventory references to sugar chests have been found. Daniel and Christian Burgner were cabinetmakers in Greene County, but unlike their brother, John Burgner of Waynesville, North Carolina, they apparently produced no sugar chests.<sup>47</sup> While sugar chests were almost nonexistent in East Tennessee, there were numerous references to “sugar boxes.” Figure 7 is a box from East Tennessee in the MESDA collection. While the original use of this box is unknown, given the other examples of sugar boxes, some of which even have





7. Sugar box, East Tennessee, 1810–1835. Walnut with an unidentified tropical hard wood and boxwood inlay; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 16 $\frac{3}{8}$ ", WOA 17 $\frac{1}{16}$ ", DOA 11 $\frac{5}{8}$ ". *Acc.* 2500.

divided interiors like sugar chests, it is probable that it was used to store sugar.

Settlement of West Tennessee did not commence until 1819 after a treaty was reached with the Chickasaw Indians. By 1830, the population of West Tennessee, including slaves, was around 99,000, about half that of East Tennessee and about a quarter that of Middle Tennessee.<sup>38</sup> A traveler through West Tennessee in 1827 recorded in her diary, "This section of country has been so recently settled the town itself [Jackson, Madison County] has not been located 5 yrs that the buildings are of course plain and many is in the unfurnished state—all articles of luxury or even what we consider necessities are extravagantly high, owing to the expense and difficulty of importation."<sup>39</sup>

Although the presence of cabinetmakers in certain counties was recorded in 1834, due to its late settlement West Tennessee did not have a strong cabinetmaking tradition in the first third of the nineteenth century.<sup>40</sup> For these reasons, the presence of sugar chests in West Tennessee was not examined in this study. However, sugar chests were increasingly made and used in West Tennessee as the population grew and the plantation economy became more established.<sup>41</sup>

The sugar chest appeared early in Middle Tennessee. The earliest reference to a sugar chest found thus far occurs in the 1805 inventory of the estate of the affluent farmer Thomas Bedford of Rutherford County.<sup>42</sup> In 1806, references to a sugar chest and a sugar table appeared in estate records of Davidson County.<sup>43</sup> By the mid-1810s, sugar chests and related designs appear with frequency in the inventories of persons of relatively substantial means in some Middle Tennessee counties.<sup>44</sup> Table 1 provides information on the years and the counties in which references to sugar chests and related forms were located in Middle Tennessee probate records. More than twice as many references are found in the records of Davidson and Williamson counties than in the others. Sugar chests were a frequent occurrence in the adjoining counties of Maury, Rutherford, and Sumner, and to a lesser extent in Dickson, Robertson, and Wilson counties. Their incidence appears to decrease according to their distance from the relatively wealthy counties of Davidson and Williamson. The infrequent mention of sugar chests in the records of Lincoln County probably relates to its later settlement and development. While the higher incidence of sugar chests in Davidson and Williamson County may relate in part to the dissemination of styles from Nashville, there also appears to be a correlation between wealth and the existence of a plantation economy on the one hand and sugar chests on the other. The interconnection of wealth, slavery, and a plantation economy in this area was evident early. After his travels through Tennessee, Kentucky, and Ohio in 1802, François André Michaux noted the fertile land of parts of Kentucky and Tennessee and commented

TABLE I  
Distribution of sugar chests and related forms by county and by year

	<i>Davidson</i>	<i>Dickson</i>	<i>Lincoln</i>	<i>Maury</i>	<i>Robertson</i>	<i>Rutherford</i>	<i>Smith</i>	<i>Sunmer</i>	<i>Williamson</i>	<i>Wilson</i>
1805		*				1				
1806	2	*								
1807		*								
1808		*								
1809		*							1	
1810	1	*						1		
1811		*								
1812	1	*							1	
1813		*								
1814	5	*						1	1	
1815	6	*	1	2		2		1		
1816	11	*		2				5	3	
1817	1	*		1				2	3	
1818	4	*				1		1	3	
1819	4	*		1				3	3	1
1820	4	*		2			1	2	3	
1821	5	*		2				*	3	
1822	6	*			1	3		*	7	
1823	2	1		2	1	1		*	5	1
1824	2	2	2	3		1	1	*	4	
1825	6		*		2	4		*	5	
1826	10		*	7	2	4			5	
1827	2		*	1	1	3	1	2	10	1
1828	7	1	*	1	3	3	2	1	10	
1829	3	1	*	9	3	1	1	4	5	1
1830	8		*		1	5	1	6	5	1
1831	7		*	6		8		2	9	
1832	3	1	*	3		3	1	1	12	5
1833	11	1	*	4	1	1	1	4	14	5
1834	3		*	3	2	6	3	2	12	2
1835	3	1	*	4	*	5		2	*	4
Total	117	8	3	53	17	52	12	40	124	21

NOTE: \* Denotes years for which records were not reviewed due to lack of availability.

TABLE 2  
Population in 1830 of certain Middle Tennessee Counties

	<i>Free Whites</i>	<i>Free People of Color</i>	<i>Slaves</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Slave Population as Percentage of Total</i>
Davidson	15,988	472	11,629	28,089	41%
Dickson	5,571	32	1,658	7,261	23%
Lincoln	17,934	64	4,088	22,086	19%
Maury	18,164	28	9,961	28,153	35%
Robertson	9,584	95	3,623	13,302	27%
Rutherford	17,321	155	8,654	26,130	33%
Smith	17,114	83	4,294	21,492	20%
Sumner	13,179	133	7,247	20,559	35%
Williamson	16,006	129	10,473	26,608	39%
Wilson	19,252	302	5,923	25,477	23%

NOTE: Information in this table was compiled from data in Eastin Morris, *Tennessee Gazetteer* (Nashville, 1834; reprint, Nashville, 1971), pp. 61-62.

on the profitability of cotton: "The poorest family may quickly acquire a certain degree of affluence in West Tennessee, particularly, if after being five or six years established, they are enabled to purchase one or two negroes and to increase the number gradually."<sup>5</sup>

The population statistics relating to slave ownership in table 2 can be read as indicators both of wealth and of a plantation economy. A comparison of the data in tables 1 and 2 provides the information that the counties with higher percentages of slaves are also the counties in which more sugar chests are found. As discussed above, the size of a household, including its slaves, has a direct bearing on sugar requirements. Thus, in Tennessee, sugar chests are most commonly found in areas characterized by wealth, the existence of a plantation economy, an early date of settlement, and relative inaccessibility to the market. The dissemination of style from Nashville to its surrounding counties also appears to have influenced the development of the form.

While an in-depth analysis of probate records was not conducted in Kentucky, geography, settlement patterns, and evidence provided by Kentucky sugar chests themselves imply a similar pattern of distribution of the form in that state. The mountains to the east provided an initial barrier to settlement. This area, like mountainous East Tennessee, remained relatively sparsely settled and poor. The ridges and hills of the "Knobs" divide the rich Bluegrass of northern Central Kentucky from the rest of the state. The Bluegrass was the earliest area of settlement in Kentucky. Harrodsburg was permanently settled in 1775, and Lexington in 1779; a fort was established near present-day Louisville in 1778.<sup>46</sup> The primary area of early sugar chest production in Kentucky was in the rich lands of the Bluegrass, in the counties surrounding Lexington and reaching northeast to the Ohio River. The style of sugar chests from the Lexington area suggests a contemporaneous development of the form in Central Kentucky and Middle Tennessee. The earliest sugar chests from this region appear to have been made at the end of the eighteenth century or the beginning of the nineteenth century. Separated from the Bluegrass region by the "Knobs" as well as the sinkhole plain known as the "Barrens," Logan County initially comprised the portion of Kentucky bounded by northern Middle Tennessee to the south and the Green and Ohio rivers to the north. This area was first explored by hunters ranging northward from Middle Tennessee. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the geographic boundaries of this region resulted in closer cultural and social ties to northern Middle Tennessee than to north Central Kentucky.<sup>47</sup> The sugar chests produced in this area of Kentucky are for the most part later than those produced in the area around Lexington and relate more closely to those made in northern Middle Tennessee.

#### ECONOMIC PATTERNS OF SUGAR CHEST OWNERSHIP

Not only did the popularity of the sugar chest vary geographically, it also varied over time through different levels of society. The

first third of the nineteenth century was a time of great change in this area of the southern Backcountry. Michaux noted the existence of many brick houses in Lexington in 1802, but was disappointed to find only seven or eight brick houses in Nashville.<sup>48</sup> In the next two decades, fashionable brick houses were built in Nashville as well as in the surrounding countryside.<sup>49</sup> Anne Newport Royall observed in 1817 that Nashville was "principally built of brick."<sup>50</sup> As the population and prosperity grew, Middle Tennesseans and Central Kentuckians demanded fashionable furnishings for their new houses. In 1818, Henry Bradshaw Fearon wrote, "Spots in Tennessee, in Ohio and Kentucky, that within the life-time of even young men, witnessed only the arrow and the scalping-knife, now present to the traveller articles of elegance and modes of luxury which might rival the displays of London and Paris."<sup>51</sup>

While travelers through Tennessee and Kentucky were unimpressed with the standard of living at the turn of the century, by the 1820s visitors to Nashville and Lexington commented favorably. These travelers' comments reflect the changing standard of living as earlier settlers developed wealth and became participants in the consumer revolution whose impact had been felt in earlier settled areas well before the American Revolution.

Capital goods rather than consumer goods represented the primary investment of aspiring landowners. In her study of consumption in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Kentucky, Elizabeth Perkins points out that early inventories are more likely to list hoes and cows than "the genteel trappings of bed and board." By the first years of the nineteenth century, however, she found that inventories reflected the ownership of increasing numbers of consumer goods.<sup>52</sup> The probate records in Middle Tennessee likewise reveal an increasing presence of consumer goods.

The 1806 inventory of Lewis Green of Davidson County reflected a comfortable household, probably one of the most comfortable in Middle Tennessee at that time, but did not reflect the proliferation of material objects seen in later years. At the time of his death,

Green owned fifteen slaves, two head of horses, eighteen head of cattle, twenty-four head of hogs, and twenty-four geese. His inventory also listed, in part:

Five Beds and furniture, 11 lbs. of Feathers, one Desk, 3 Tables, *one Sugar Chest*, one Rum Case, two Looking Glasses, Eleven Chairs, 3 Trunks, one Broken Set of Chania [china] . . . 2½ Dozen Plates, 5 Tumblers . . . half dozen Silver Table Spoons, one Dozen Tea Spoons, 2 Sugar Cannisters . . . half Dozen Tin Cups.<sup>53</sup>

Ten years later, the inventory of the estate of the wealthy merchant William Tait contained even more consumer items. Tait, a Scotsman, had moved to Nashville in 1786 from Philadelphia, served as mayor of the town from 1811 to 1813, and was the largest landowner in Davidson County at the time of his death.<sup>54</sup> The inventory of his estate not only listed the items he owned at the time of his death, but also placed a value on them. Among these items were the following:

One secretary and bookcase valued at \$70.00  
Fifty-nine yards of Brussels carpeting valued at \$177.00  
One sideboard valued at \$50.00  
*One sugar chest valued at \$3.50*  
One "sett Dining Northumberland Tables" valued at \$25.00  
Twelve red "guilt" chairs with two arm chairs valued at \$50.00  
Twelve yellow chairs valued at \$20.00  
One "sett Blue Table china ware" valued at \$50.00  
Two dozen table knives and forks with ivory handles valued at \$14.00  
Eight window curtains, "complete" valued at \$50.00  
One backgammon box valued at \$6.00<sup>55</sup>

By the second decade of the nineteenth century, the wealth created by the healthy plantation economy in backcountry towns like Lexington and Nashville allowed men like William Tait to devote their attention to mercantile activities in addition to farming. These men built substantial houses in town and furnished them in a fashionable manner.

Captain J. E. Alexander spent time in Nashville in 1833 during his year of travels throughout North and South America. After dining at

the home of Thomas Yeatman, "a wealthy and most intelligent gentleman," Captain Alexander wrote: "And I beg to state for the information of the silver-fork school, that in the houses of the *gens comme il faut* at Nashville, there was handsome furniture, a handsome table-service, and above all, handsome ladies to preside. What more need I say?"<sup>56</sup>

Yeatman's house was very finely furnished, according to the 1834 inventory of his estate. The inventory listed, among other items: eight sofas, thirty-six rush-bottom chairs, twelve mahogany chairs, nine portraits, three Brussels carpets, seven ingrain carpets, two pier tables and glasses, three gilt-framed mantle glasses, two pairs of card tables, a round marble-top center table, a nest of tea tables, a piano, a sideboard, two breakfast tables, a dining table, and a wine cooler. Yeatman also had owned an extensive wine cellar comprised of, in part, one barrel of Madeira, "7½ doz. Champagne Wine in Boxes", two dozen barrels of wine, six dozen barrels of claret, and thirty-one barrels of pale and red sherry.<sup>57</sup>

While the 1816 inventory of William Tait listed a sugar chest, the 1833 inventory of Thomas Yeatman did not. In the years which elapsed between the deaths of these two men, the pattern of ownership of sugar chests began to change. While the sugar-chest-owning segment of the population initially comprised the upper crust of society, over time sugar chests were increasingly owned by a wider segment of society. By the late 1810s in Davidson County and by the early 1820s in the surrounding counties of Middle Tennessee, the elite as well as comfortable farmers owned sugar chests. While sugar chests continued to be made and used in some households in Tennessee and Kentucky throughout the 1840s, they ceased to be found in urban elite households by the 1820s. Perhaps the best illustration of this changing pattern of ownership lies in the estate records pertaining to John Childress of Nashville. Childress built Rokeby, a stylish five-bay brick house, shortly before he died.<sup>58</sup> The account of his estate sale, recorded in November 1820, included the following items and sale prices:



1 set dining china, \$25.00  
 1 set tea china, \$12.00  
 3 sets of knives and forks, \$15.00  
 1 set dining tables, \$40.00  
 1 set card tables, \$20.00  
 1 sideboard, \$50.00  
 1 desk and bookcase, \$40.00  
 1 piano forte, \$100.00  
 1 Brussels carpet, \$100.00  
 1 sugar chest, \$5.25<sup>60</sup>

Most of the household furnishings owned by Childress were purchased by his wife Elizabeth at the sale of his estate. Indeed, the only household furniture not purchased by Mrs. Childress were two bedsteads, a flax wheel, and the sugar chest. When an extensive room-by-room inventory was taken after her death, the house was still expensively and elegantly appointed, but did not contain a sugar chest.<sup>61</sup> Mrs. Childress must have decided that she no longer needed or wanted one.

The absence of sugar chests in some of the wealthiest and best-furnished households in Davidson County was a pattern that continued through the 1820s and 1830s, particularly in the households of men who derived their principal income from sources other than farming.<sup>62</sup> The sugar chest retained its popularity for a longer period of time in the rural areas of Davidson County and in the counties surrounding Davidson. By the 1830s, however, some elite households, particularly of town residents, no longer owned sugar chests.<sup>63</sup> This change can be explained in terms of both practicality and dissemination of style.

As discussed above, by the 1820s sugar had become less expensive and more readily available in this area of the southern Backcountry. The need for a town resident to purchase and store large quantities of sugar had declined.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, as sugar became less expensive and more readily available, perhaps some of the status attached to sugar and, by extension, sugar chests, began to diminish, at least at the upper levels of society. The sugar chest, an easily recognizable

form of furniture during the first third of the nineteenth century in Middle Tennessee and Central Kentucky, conveyed the same status that owning and serving sugar and sweets did, for it represented the ability to store large quantities of this expensive commodity. The prominent display of sugar chests in the public rooms of houses in these areas in the early nineteenth century indicates that they were meant to be seen. As the elite became increasingly conscious of gentility and codes of fashion during the 1820s, the sugar chest may have ceased to function for them as a status symbol. The association of sugar and sugar chests with status lasted longer in households with less wealth or those situated in a more rural setting.<sup>64</sup> The sugar chest apparently became unfashionable among the elite of Nashville and, presumably, of Lexington, but its popularity continued in less wealthy households and in more rural areas.

A close examination of John Childress's probate inventory reveals not only the presence of a wide variety of expensive consumer goods, but also objects with specialized uses (dining china and tea china, dining tables and card tables) and rooms with specified uses. This room-by-room inventory indicates a fairly well articulated separation of functions between dining room, parlor, family room, chambers, and kitchen.<sup>65</sup> During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Americans increasingly were concerned with "differentiation, specialization, and individualization," not just of furniture and other consumables, but also of household spaces.<sup>66</sup> By the late 1810s and early 1820s, the elite of Middle Tennessee and Central Kentucky were well enough established to respond to this trend as their counterparts in earlier settled areas had a generation or two before. As people began to delineate public and private spaces in their houses, certain activities such as sleeping, cooking, and washing were displaced from the front or public rooms to the upstairs or the back of the house.<sup>67</sup> At the same time as the sugar chest form was developing, its owners were attempting to define the functions of the public rooms of their houses and to determine what furniture should be contained in these rooms. Probate inventories indicate that sugar

chests and related forms were kept in dining or other public rooms of houses rather than in kitchens, where one might expect to find foodstuffs stored.<sup>68</sup> The placement of sugar chests in the dining room, however, seems more logical when viewed in the context of the evolution of public rooms and the gradual removal of such activities as cooking from these rooms. The placement of sugar chests in public rooms suggests the symbolic value of sugar as well as an incomplete process of room definition. While ownership of sugar chests had become common among the upper and upper-middle class of Middle Tennessee and Central Kentucky in the first twenty years of the nineteenth century, subsequent changes rendered the sugar chest both less necessary and less fashionable. The sugar chest, with its food-storage function, was abandoned as representing the old-fashioned organization of rooms with mixed usages.

While sugar chests may have become unfashionable in certain sectors of society by the 1820s, they continued to be made and used in rural areas and in less wealthy households in town. Elmore W. Williams, a farmer and part-time cabinetmaker in rural Davidson County, Tennessee, made a sugar chest in 1840 a few months before his second marriage.<sup>69</sup> This piece, which is signed and dated by Williams, is illustrated in figure 8.<sup>70</sup> The daybook of Levi Cochran of Marshall County, Tennessee, records that his son John made a sugar chest in 1849 that sold for \$7.00.<sup>71</sup> References to sugar chests were found in the probate records of Dickson County as late as 1850.<sup>72</sup>



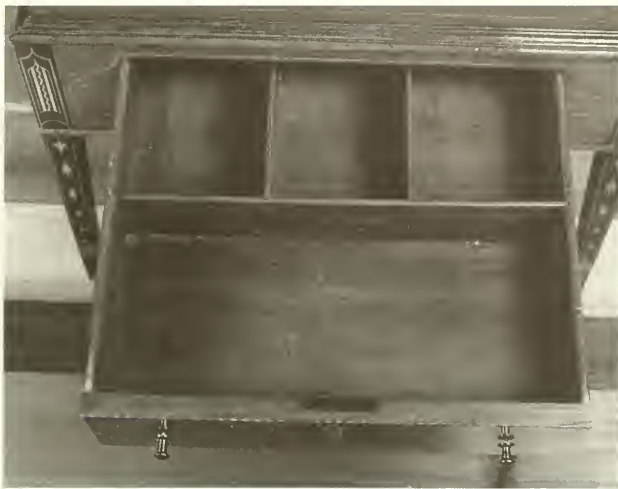
8. Sugar chest, signed and dated by Elmore W. Williams, Davidson County, Tennessee, 1840. Fiddleback maple; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 40 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (4 $\frac{1}{2}$ " of feet replaced), WOA 27 $\frac{5}{8}$ ", DOA 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". *Private collection.*

While the style of the sugar chest evolved over time, the basic form remained the same—a rectangular, boxlike storage bin with a hinged lid set upon legs. Most sugar chests have a drawer, although examples exist that do not. The earlier form consists of a dovetailed box attached to a frame with tapered legs (fig. 1).<sup>73</sup> The bin of this Davidson County, Tennessee, sugar chest, like most sugar chests, is divided into three compartments, one large and two smaller. The larger compartment provided storage for the more commonly used and less expensive brown sugar.<sup>74</sup> The smaller compartments housed white (loaf) sugar and coffee.<sup>75</sup> The drawer, like the bin, is partitioned into three compartments, perhaps to provide storage for sugar nippers and a variety of spices. The overall form of this sugar chest and the more elegant one shown in figure 9, discussed below, make it virtually indistinguishable from a bottle case or cellaret with a drawer (see figure 2) until the bin lid is raised.

An elaborately inlaid sugar chest that descended in the family of Andrew Jackson similarly features tapered legs and a tripartite storage bin (figure 9). The drawer is divided into four compartments (figure 9a). Like the chest illustrated as figure 1, the case of this sugar chest is constructed with half-blind dovetails, visible only at the sides of the case. The construction of the lid is more sophisticated, however, with vertically veneered



9. Sugar chest, Davidson or Sumner County, Tennessee, 1790–1810. Walnut with light wood inlay; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 37<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>", WOA 25<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>", DOA 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>". *Collection of The Hermitage: Home of President Andrew Jackson, Nashville, Tennessee, Acc. 1942-2-1.*



9a. Detail of figure 9.

facings applied to the edges of the lid at the sides and front. The ogee molding of figure 1 and the cove and ovolo molding of figure 9 are classical features that continue to be seen on early neoclassical furniture. The inlay decoration of figure 9 and the tapered legs and moldings of both figures 1 and 9 place both these chests within the prevailing early neoclassical style.

Although inlay is frequently found on East Tennessee furniture and simple string inlay is found on some pieces of Middle Tennessee furniture, the extensive and sophisticated inlay on the Jackson sugar chest is rare in furniture made in Middle Tennessee. The only known pieces of Middle Tennessee furniture having a comparable amount of decoration are two desks attributed to the Quarles cabinet shop in Wilson County.<sup>6</sup> However, it is apparent from an examination of the Jackson sugar chest and one of the Quarles desks that they are not the products of the same shop.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to the furniture of Middle Tennessee, some furniture from Central Kentucky, particularly from the area surrounding Lexington, does feature figural inlay. Figure 10, attributed to that area, has the vine-and-flower commonly found on Kentucky early neo-classical furniture. Like figure 11, also from Central Kentucky, has inlaid decoration and tapered legs, but it has a more elongated, rectilinear format typical of later sugar chests. A precise



10. Sugar chest, Central Kentucky, 1800–1820. Cherry with light wood inlay; tulip poplar and walnut (drawer guides) secondary. HOA 38 $\frac{1}{2}$ " , WOA 26 $\frac{5}{8}$ " , DOA 19 $\frac{7}{8}$ ". MRF S-3159.



11. Sugar chest, Central Kentucky, 1790–1810. Cherry with light wood inlay; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 30 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", WOA 38 $\frac{1}{4}$ ", DOA 17 $\frac{3}{8}$ ". MRF 5–55.40.

attribution of such inlaid pieces to specific counties or towns in Kentucky awaits a thorough analysis of cabinetmaking schools in the state, which, owing to the complex nature of the known examples, has yet to be undertaken.

A slightly later sugar chest that descended in a Lincoln County, Tennessee, family (figure 12) combines elements of both the early and late neoclassical periods. The shaped skirt, an unusual detail for a sugar chest, is an early feature, while the turned legs, the wide fillet of the molding on the edge of the lid, and the flattened ogee bed molding represent later stylistic developments. While clearly the product of a cabinetmaker, the exposed dovetailing of the box is a less sophisticated construction than the previous examples. The di-



12. Sugar chest, Lincoln County, Tennessee, 1815–1830. Cherry; tulip poplar secondary. HOA  $38^{9\frac{1}{16}}"$ , WOA  $31^{1\frac{1}{8}}"$ , DOA  $16^{1\frac{1}{16}}"$ . MRF S-11668.

mensions of this sugar chest also distinguish it from the earlier examples. While of relatively the same height, it is wider and less deep than most chests of this period. Unlike most sugar chests, this example does not have a partitioned interior.

The most common style of sugar chest is represented by the chest illustrated in figure 13, which descended in the family of Judge John Overton of Davidson County, Tennessee.<sup>78</sup> This relatively unadorned





13. Sugar chest, Davidson County, Tennessee, 1815–1830. Cherry; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 36 $\frac{5}{8}$ ", WOA 28 $\frac{1}{4}$ ", DOA 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". *Private collection.*

case joined with half-blind dovetails and set upon turned legs is distinguished by its proportions, the molded lid, and the delicate details of its turnings. The lack of bed molding at the base of this case represents a later stylistic development seen on northern coastal furniture by the early 1810s.<sup>79</sup>

The relatively short legs of the sugar chest illustrated in figure 14 distinguish it from the more typical forms with taller legs. Not only



14. Sugar chest, Davidson or Maury County, Tennessee, 1820–1830. Cherry; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 29", WOA 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", DOA 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". *Private collection.*

is this chest shorter than the other chests illustrated, its storage capacity is also smaller because its width is six to twelve inches less than the other chests. Perhaps because of the small overall size, the interior was not partitioned into separate storage compartments and probably was used solely for the storage of brown sugar.

While retaining the same basic form of a partitioned storage bin with legs, some later sugar chests feature joined, rather than dovetailed, construction. Figure 15, attributed to Central Kentucky, is an unusual hybrid of early and late neoclassical characteristics. It retains

the basic form of earlier sugar chests consisting of a box attached to a frame; however, in this instance, the box is not dovetailed but is joined by a full-height shouldered tenon joint, the tenon being a projection of the inside face of the front. It features inlay more typically found on earlier chests, but its short turned legs and lack of moldings attest to its later manufacture.

Unlike figure 15, most earlier joined chests retain tall legs which are turned integrally with the stiles, into which the front, back, and sides are tenoned. Figure 16 is representative of this structural and



15. Sugar chest, Central Kentucky, 1820–1835. Cherry with light wood inlay; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 33", WOA 30 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", DOA 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". MRF S-2764. *Collection of Liberty Hall, Frankfort, Kentucky.*



16. Sugar chest, labeled by Henry H. Webb, Central Kentucky, 1820–1830. Cherry; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 28 $\frac{7}{8}$ ", WOA 35 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", DOA 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". *Private collection.*

stylistic development. This Kentucky sugar chest bears the printed label "Henry H. Webb/Manufacturer."<sup>80</sup> Williams and Harsh illustrate a similar sugar chest which they attribute to Sumner County, Tennessee.<sup>81</sup>

Figure 17, from the collection of the Shaker Museum at South Union, Kentucky, illustrates the last development in joined sugar chests. This form, which resembles a chest more than a bottle case, consists of an elongated rectilinear case with paneled front and ends;

it is set on short turned legs and has no drawer. Attributed to Logan County, Kentucky, this example appears to be typical of late sugar chests from southern Kentucky and northern Middle Tennessee.<sup>82</sup>

Virtually all documented furniture forms designed for the storage of sugar are made of local woods, utilizing cherry, walnut, or occasionally maple or tulip poplar as primary materials and tulip poplar, walnut, or infrequently yellow pine, oak, and ash as secondary woods.<sup>83</sup> Fortescue Cuming, who traveled through Kentucky and ventured briefly into Tennessee in 1808, commented on the beauty



17. Sugar chest, Logan County, Kentucky, 1830–1840. Cherry; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 33½", WOA 34", DOA 18½". *Collection of the Shaker Museum at South Union, Kentucky. Photograph by Shutterbug.*

of the local woods. In his description of Lexington, Kentucky, Cum-  
ing wrote, "There are four cabinetmaking shops where household  
furniture is manufactured in as handsome a style as any part of  
America, and where the high finish which is given to native walnut  
and cherry timber, precludes the regret that mahogany is not to be  
had but at an immense expense."<sup>84</sup>

While mahogany was available in Kentucky and Tennessee by the  
early 1810s, most furniture was constructed of local woods.<sup>85</sup> The  
1825 inventory and account of sales of the estate of James B. Hous-  
ton of Nashville recorded only two pieces of furniture constructed of  
mahogany. A mahogany sideboard valued at \$181.00 was the most  
expensive piece of furniture listed; also recorded was a mahogany  
secretary valued at \$61.00. His inventory most frequently mentioned  
furniture of walnut, cherry, or tulip poplar.<sup>86</sup>

Figure 18 (illustrated in its pre-restoration condition) from Maury  
County, Tennessee, is a unique example of a mahogany-veneered  
sugar chest. The pulvinated plinth which incorporates a drawer and  
the Grecian scrolled feet of this dovetailed chest emulate urban late  
neoclassical furniture. It was undoubtedly commissioned by a mem-  
ber of the rural elite who was aware of the fashionability of ma-  
hogany, but did not realize that sugar chests themselves were no  
longer fashionable. Instead of having a partitioned case, this sugar  
chest is fitted with a removable box which is partitioned.<sup>87</sup> This fea-  
ture is frequently seen on sugar chests from southern Middle Ten-  
nessee made throughout the period under consideration.

Contrary to popular belief that most sugar chests were plantation-  
made,<sup>88</sup> extant records demonstrate that cabinetmakers commonly  
made and sold sugar chests. The estate of the Nashville cabin-  
maker Daniel McBean included four sugar chests, one of which had  
been made to order for a customer, the other three were sold at his  
estate sale.<sup>89</sup> The daybook of Levi Cochran, a cabinetmaker in Bed-  
ford (later Marshall) County, recorded the sale of five sugar chests  
between the years 1828 and 1835.<sup>90</sup> Samuel S. Holding of Fayetteville  
(Lincoln County), Tennessee, advertised sugar chests to be sold at



18. Sugar chest, Maury County, Tennessee, 1835–1855. Mahogany veneer and walnut (top); tulip poplar and yellow pine (drawer bottom) secondary. HOA 28 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (without feet), WOA 31", DOA 22 $\frac{1}{8}$ ". *Private collection.*

auction in 1828.<sup>91</sup> While some may have been made by a less skilled craftsman, virtually all extant sugar chests were the work of a trained cabinetmaker, whether made on or off the plantation. Sugar chests sold at estate sales during the first third of the nineteenth century ranged in price from 25 cents<sup>92</sup> to \$12.00,<sup>93</sup> although the average price was between \$4.00 and \$6.00.<sup>94</sup> The relative prices no doubt reflected the quality, the materials, and desirability of a particular piece.

As indicated by table 3, other furniture forms were designed for the storage of sugar. Inventory references to sugar desks—the second most common form—and to sugar cases, sugar stands, sugar tables, bureaus and sugar chests, and sugar presses or cupboards have been found. There was a single listing of a sideboard sugar chest.

### *Sugar Desks*

The most common variation of the sugar chest was the sugar desk which, when closed, resembles a small slant-front desk. In its simplest form the slanted lid, which may be hinged at either the top or the bottom, lifts to reveal a storage bin like that of a sugar chest. The interior may also be fitted with drawers for the storage of spices.

The geographic distribution of the sugar desk is narrower than that of the sugar chest. Traditionally believed to be most common in Kentucky, the form was also known in Middle Tennessee. The provenances of extant sugar desks attributable to Kentucky indicate that sugar desks, like sugar chests, were produced in Central Kentucky in the area extending southward from Maysville, through Paris, Lexington, and Danville, and into Green County (see figure 3). As shown in table 3, in Tennessee, sugar desks most commonly were mentioned in estate records in northern Middle Tennessee, particularly in Sumner County. Given the geographic location of these counties adjacent to Kentucky, one is tempted to circumscribe a geographic region for the production of sugar chests reaching from Lexington, Kentucky, to northern Middle Tennessee. However, an examination of the probate records of Logan County, Kentucky, just north of the Tennessee border, reveals that although the sugar desk form was known in that county, it was not a common form; only four sugar-desk references were located in comparison to twenty-two references to sugar chests. This suggests the existence of two separate areas of sugar desk production. Given the experimentation with adaption of storage forms indulged in by cabinetmakers and their clients, it is possible that the



TABLE 3  
Distribution of different forms by county

	<i>Sugar Chest</i>	<i>Sugar Desk</i>	<i>Sugar Case</i>	<i>Sugar Stand</i>	<i>Sugar Table</i>	<i>Sideboard Sugar Chest</i>	<i>Sugar Bureau</i>	<i>Sugar Press/ Cupboard</i>
Davidson	112		1	1		1	2	
Dickson	8							
Lincoln	3							
Maury	45	2	2	1	1			2
Robertson	14	1	2					
Rutherford	48		1	1				2
Smith	8	1	1	1			1	
Sumner	24	16						
Williamson	121	1	1				1	
Wilson	12	3	2	3	1			

NOTE: Objects that were listed in one document pertaining to an estate as a sugar chest, and in another document as a sugar desk, stand, or bureau, have been included in this chart under the heading for the less common form. For example, an object listed alternatively as a sugar chest and a sugar desk has been included as a sugar desk in this chart.

sugar desk form was developed independently in both these areas. It seems more likely that one area was influenced by the other either by movement of cabinetmaker, patron, or even the object itself. However, to date no such connection has been found. While the basic form is the same in both Kentucky and Tennessee, there appears to be little stylistic correlation between the sugar desks produced in each region. The form also reached a fuller development in Kentucky as shown by the illustrated examples as well as by the existence of at least two sugar desk-and-bookcases, one sugar secretary-and-bookcase, and miniature sugar desks in Kentucky.

Figure 19, a sugar desk from Bourbon County, Kentucky, is fitted with a fallboard, lopers (fallboard supports), and a fully detailed in-

19. Sugar desk, Central Kentucky, 1790–1810. Cherry with light wood inlay; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 34<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>", WOA 30<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>", DOA 15<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>". Collection of The J. B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky. Acc. 94.1.



terior, all of which cause it to resemble a small desk.<sup>37</sup> The rear half of the writing surface of this example is replaced: it was made as a sliding cover which opened to reveal the sugar storage bin contained in the lower portion of the case. While the blocked central drawers and bed molding make this interior the most elaborate known to a sugar desk, other features relate this object to furniture made in the area. The narrow chamfered corners, the “barber pole” inlay, and the use of geometric inlaid banding at the base of the case are features commonly found on furniture from Central Kentucky.<sup>38</sup>

The lunetted corner stringing on the front of the case and the



20. Sugar desk, Central Kentucky, 1790–1810. Cherry with walnut and light wood inlay; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 32", WOA 31¼", DOA 15½". MRF S-3147.

geometric inlay around the base are details shared by the sugar desk illustrated in figure 20. The simplified interior, shaped skirt, and rectangular lopers of the latter example contrast with figure 19. It is apparent that both of these objects were intended to function as writing desks.

The elaborately veneered sham drawers of the sugar desk in figure 21 lend an even greater appearance of a standard writing desk when the fallboard is closed. When the fallboard is opened, two storage bins are revealed. While this sugar desk presently does not have a fitted interior, given the facade of this piece, it seems likely that the in-

terior desk fittings have been removed. The lack of lopers on this sugar desk, however, does raise the question as to whether it was meant to function as a desk or just as a decorative storage bin.<sup>97</sup> The oval inlay on the fallboard, and the shape of the feet and their returns, bear close relationship to a desk recorded by MESDA that in turn has foot and skirt shaping related to the base of the example in figure 20.<sup>98</sup> Like figure 20, figure 21 has edge inlay running the full height of the front corners of the case. The intertwined styles of both form and decoration of these sugar desks reveal the interrela-



21. Sugar desk, Central Kentucky, 1790–1810. Cherry with light wood inlay and walnut cross-banding; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 32<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>", WOA 30", DOA 14<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>". MRF S-3205.

tion of a number of cabinetmaking shops in Central Kentucky during this period and the difficulty of distinguishing between the work of these shops until additional field research is conducted.

Further regionality of form and decoration is apparent from the sugar desk illustrated in figure 22. This sugar desk forms a part of a group of furniture from Mason County, Kentucky, that frequently has been attributed to Peter Tuttle, based on an inscription carved on an interior drawer fitting of a chest.<sup>100</sup> While the pieces in this group appear to be the work of more than one cabinetmaker, all are



22. Sugar desk, Mason County, Kentucky, 1800–1825. Walnut with light wood and cherry inlay; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 39<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>", WOA 35<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>", DOA 18". MRF S-3165.

characterized by short cabriole legs and a two-part construction consisting of a frame to which the case is attached by screws. Like figures 19 and 20, figure 22 is fitted with interior desk drawers and lopers, and has a storage bin accessible below the rear half of the writing surface. With a height of 39 $\frac{7}{8}$  inches, this example is larger than the other sugar desks illustrated but is still smaller than most southern writing desks.

The sugar desk illustrated in figure 23 has been attributed to Kentucky, but it was purchased in Sumner County, Tennessee in the



23. Sugar desk, Sumner County, Tennessee, 1800–1820. Walnut; tulip poplar, hickory (back of frame and frame of large drawers), oak (small drawer frames). HOA 41 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", WOA 26 $\frac{1}{4}$ ", DOA 17 $\frac{1}{4}$ ".  
*Private collection.*

1940s. With its high tapered legs, this rare form resembles a desk-on-frame.

The sugar desk in figure 24 descended in a Sumner County, Tennessee, family and was acquired by the family of the current owners in the 1930s. The interior is fitted with drawers and pigeonholes; the drawer pulls on the exterior drawer are replacements. The lid is hinged at the bottom and originally had lopers, providing this sugar desk with a usable writing surface. The rear half of the writing surface lifts to reveal a divided storage bin inside the lower portion of the case (figure 24a). Sugar desks with extensive inlay and sham drawers such as the Central Kentucky examples illustrated above apparently were not produced in Tennessee. Figure 24 appears to represent the fullest development of the sugar desk form in Tennessee.



24. Sugar desk, Sumner County, Tennessee, 1800–1820. Cherry and walnut (base frame); tulip poplar and walnut (bottom of storage bin). HOA  $33\frac{3}{4}$ ", WOA  $34\frac{1}{2}$ ", DOA 17". *Private collection.*



24a. Detail of figure 24.



25. Sugar desk, Marshall County, Tennessee, 1830–1840. Cherry; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 3'–", WOA 26", DOA 21". Private collection. Photograph courtesy of Nathan Harsh.

With its short turned legs and joined case construction, the form of figure 25, from Marshall County, Tennessee, is reminiscent of late sugar chests. This sugar desk has a lid hinged at the top so that when opened, interior drawers and the storage bin are visible. There is no writing surface except for the exterior of the lid, which would have been used much in the fashion of an accounting or "schoolmaster's" desk. With this example, the sugar desk form has deteriorated to the point that it resembles a meal or flour bin. Similar examples may have caused the confusion in terminology evident in some estate records where an object was described as a sugar desk in one document but as a sugar chest in another.<sup>100</sup> Other records clearly differentiate the two forms, however. The 1819 "Account of the Sales of the Property of Cornelius Herndon of Sumner County, Tennessee" lists both a sugar chest and a sugar desk.<sup>101</sup>

Evidence exists that sugar desks, like sugar chests, also were produced by cabinetmakers. The estate of Mary Quarles of Wilson County, Tennessee, the widow of cabinetmaker Roger Quarles, included a sugar desk.<sup>102</sup> While no Tennessee newspaper advertisements by cabinetmakers have been located that mention sugar desks, one such advertisement did appear in an 1814 newspaper in Lexington, Kentucky.<sup>103</sup> A loose page from an account book in the MESDA research files reflects that in 1816 Joshua Nichols charged William Crutchfield from an unknown location in Kentucky \$12.00 for a sugar desk.<sup>104</sup> Sugar desks itemized in Middle Tennessee probate records ranged in



price from \$1.00 to \$6.12, with an average price of around \$5.00. These prices are comparable to those of sugar chests, but less than the prices of conventional desks. For example, at the 1816 estate sale of Joseph Motheral of Sumner County, Tennessee, a sugar desk was sold for \$3.00 and a desk for \$17.25.<sup>105</sup> Likewise, at the estate sale of the Davidson County, Tennessee, cabinetmaker Daniel McBean, a cherry sugar chest was sold for \$8.25 and a cherry desk for \$30.00.<sup>106</sup> The prices commanded by these sugar desks in Middle Tennessee suggest that they were of relatively simple form without an elaborate fitted interior or sham drawers. While one sugar desk did sell for \$13.25 at an estate sale in Logan County, Kentucky (which borders Tennessee), the other three sugar desks in the records of this county sold for \$5.00, \$7.00, and 50 cents.<sup>107</sup>

Ostensibly, ownership of a sugar desk could have obviated the need for a desk. However, of the twenty-three Middle Tennessee estates that itemized a sugar desk, thirteen also included a desk or secretary.<sup>108</sup> Ownership of both a sugar desk and a conventional desk almost certainly resulted from the fact that some sugar desks did not have writing surfaces. Because of the different forms of sugar desks and the lack of detailed descriptions in estate records, it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding the use of sugar desks for more than storage of sugar.

While it is possible to determine the areas where sugar chests and desks were prevalent, other forms occur infrequently throughout the area of sugar chest production in Tennessee and Kentucky. Because these forms and the references to them are so rare, it is not possible to circumscribe more precisely the areas in which they were made.

### *Sugar Cases*

Some of the terms for alternative forms of sugar chests are more difficult to interpret than others. *Sugar case* could refer to a piece of furniture resembling a bottle case or a cellaret. While there were some inventory references to a case and bottles, bottle case, or liquor case in both East and Middle Tennessee, the furniture form was

widespread in southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina (see figure 2), a center of considerable out-migration to Middle Tennessee.<sup>109</sup> These bottle cases apparently also existed independent of stands. The term *sugar case* therefore may have referred to a box or case designed for the storage of sugar, perhaps with a stand from which it may have been removable.

At the sale of the estate of William Dickson in 1816, a sugar case sold for \$6.25, a price comparable to sugar chests sold at other estate sales in Davidson County, Tennessee that year.<sup>110</sup> However, in Maury County, Tennessee, in 1817 a sugar case sold at an estate sale in for a mere \$1.20, suggesting that the sugar case sold the year before in Davidson County may have been a very different object. Instead, this sugar case may have consisted simply of a large box without a stand.<sup>111</sup> In 1830, Thomas Cotter of Rutherford County purchased a "Table and Sugar Case" for \$2.43<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>, a term that implies that the sugar case rested upon or was fastened to the table.<sup>112</sup>

While it is difficult to draw any definitive conclusions regarding the form of a sugar case from these references, it seems likely that it resembled a bottle case of the period. These cases may have had a stand to rest upon. The 1806 inventory of the estate of Lewis Green of Davidson County listed both a sugar chest and a "rum case," implying a distinction between the terms chest and case, as well as a differentiation between forms designed to store sugar and those designed to store liquor.<sup>113</sup> Figure 5, from piedmont South Carolina, might have been called a sugar case in the early 1800s. It consists of a removable box set on a stand and has one partition that divides the storage bin into compartments approximately two-thirds and one-third the size of the overall storage space. Unlike most sugar chests, this sugar case does not have a drawer.

### *Sugar Stands*

The term *sugar stand* is also problematical. During the period, "stand" referred to either a small table or a smaller footed object of wood, metal, or ceramic that was intended to rest on a piece of fur-

niture, such as an inkstand. The inventory references to sugar stands also appear to carry both meanings. Table 3 includes sugar stands only if the item listed in the inventory appeared to be a stand-alone object. Thomas Kirkman of Nashville owned two cut-glass sugar stands and two cut-glass butter stands at the time of his death.<sup>114</sup> Here, the term *stand* indicates a footed tray. However, Thomas Hutchings owned an object that was described once as a sugar chest and once as a sugar stand.<sup>115</sup> Hutchings' sugar stand therefore must have been an item of furniture designed for the storage rather than display or use of sugar. Given the confusion of even contemporary terminology, it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding distinctions between forms. However, the inventory of the property of Adnah Donnell of Wilson County provides evidence that some people did distinguish between the two terms. The entry for "one sugar chest" is crossed out to read "one sugar stand."<sup>116</sup> A sugar stand may have been a form constructed with integral legs, rather than a separately framed base. Perhaps "sugar stand" referred to a form of sugar chest such as the one illustrated in figure 6.

### *Sugar Tables*

Only two inventory references to a sugar table were found in the records of the ten Middle Tennessee counties examined in the course of this research. The form appears to have been more prevalent in Kentucky. Since a normal table height is between 28 and 30 inches, most of the objects illustrated thus far do not seem to fit the terminology for a "sugar table." Moreover, the term *sugar table* apparently was not an alternative name for a sugar chest; the account of the sale of the property of Pumal Hearn of Wilson County itemizes both a sugar table and a sugar chest.<sup>117</sup> While no "sugar tables" attributable to Tennessee have been located, figure 26 probably would have been called a sugar table in the early nineteenth century. With a height of 28 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches, a width of 38 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches, and a depth of 20 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches, it could function as a table. The front, back, and sides of this example are joined to the legs by shouldered tenons which are pinned. This

type of construction is typical of stands and side tables. Later cabinetmakers applied this same system of joined construction to full-height cases. (See discussion of construction of figures 15 and 16). Other sugar tables with a lift-top have been located in Kentucky.<sup>118</sup> The sugar table illustrated in figure 27, with a Buncombe County, North Carolina, provenance, may be a unique example. This table does not have a hinged lid, but instead has a deep drawer fitted with three compartments as in the typical sugar chest plan.



26. Sugar chest or table, Central Kentucky, 1800–1820. Cherry with walnut and light wood inlay; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 28<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>", WOA 38<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>", DOA 20<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>". *Collection of The J. B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky. Acc. 45.81.*



27. Sugar table,  
Buncombe  
County, North  
Carolina,  
1800–1840. Wal-  
nut; tulip poplar,  
oak (partitions),  
yellow pine  
(drawer runner).  
HOA 29", WOA  
31½", DOA 22½".  
*Private collection.*

### *Sideboard Sugar Chests*

The 1825 inventory and account of sales of the estate of cabinet-maker James B. Houston contains the sole reference known to a "Side Board Sugar Chest." Houston, who had been in business in Nashville since 1814, operated a large cabinet shop with eleven workbenches. Included among the items of cabinetware sold after his death was the sideboard sugar chest for \$90.00, as well as numerous other sideboards ranging in price from \$77.00 to \$181.00 (a mahogany sideboard).<sup>119</sup> Williams and Harsh illustrate two examples of

28. Sideboard sugar chest, Robertson County, Tennessee, 1820–1840. Cherry with maple escutcheons; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 37", WOA 61¾", DOA 18½". *Private collection.*



sideboard sugar chests in which a portion of the top is hinged and lifts to reveal a storage bin.<sup>120</sup> The joined case of the sideboard sugar chest illustrated in figure 28 is divided into three large storage spaces—a storage bin at either side with a hinged lid, and a central section containing a single deep drawer. The lack of partitions in the bins and the drawer leaves open the issue as to whether this sideboard was intended for the storage of bottles as well as sugar.

### *Sugar Presses and Sugar Bureaus*

Like sugar desks and sideboard sugar chests, sugar presses and sugar bureaus were designed to serve more than one function. Only four references to each of these forms in Tennessee probate records are known. The term *press* was virtually interchangeable with the term *cupboard* in the nineteenth century. Inventory references were

found to china presses and linen presses as well as china cupboards and linen cupboards. Given this interchangeability of terminology, four objects with different descriptions have been classified together in table 3 as sugar presses/cupboards.<sup>121</sup> Williams and Harsh located two objects that could be described as sugar presses, one of which is illustrated in figure 29. The lid of this Sumner County sugar press lifts to reveal a divided storage bin.<sup>122</sup> The research files at MESDA contain a photograph of a sugar press attributed to Kentucky.<sup>123</sup>



29. Sugar press, Sumner County, Tennessee, 1820–1850. Cherry; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 40 $\frac{1}{8}$ ", WOA 36 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", DOA 21 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". *Private collection.*

The term *bureau* frequently appears in Tennessee and Kentucky inventories and cabinetmaker's advertisements of the first third of the nineteenth century. In early nineteenth-century America, "bureau" generally referred to a chest of four drawers the width of the case, although the term could have other meanings as well.<sup>124</sup> A "bureau sugar chest" or "bureau and sugar chest" therefore was another furniture form that combined different functions, in this case, presumably a sugar storage bin and at least two drawers for storage. J. D. Goodall of Smith County, Tennessee, owned "One Bureau Sugar Chest" at the time of his death according to his inventory of 1830.<sup>125</sup> Like *sugar case*, *sugar stand*, and *sugar table*, the term *bureau sugar*



30. Sugar bureau, Davidson County, Tennessee, 1830–1850. Cherry; tulip poplar secondary. HOA 40 $\frac{1}{8}$ ", WOA 36 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", DOA 21 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". *Private collection.*



*chest* is difficult to pinpoint, but the object illustrated in figure 30 meets the description of the form. The large storage bin originally was divided into two compartments, one large and one smaller, and the upper drawer is partitioned into several sections. The lower drawer conceivably could have provided storage for table linens. Its resemblance to a small chest of drawers or bureau is heightened by the scrolls on either side of the drawers, a feature commonly found on bureaus of the period.<sup>126</sup>

#### INCREASING SPECIALIZATION OF FURNITURE FORMS

The development of the wide variety of furniture forms used to store sugar needs to be examined with regard to the development of other furniture forms and an emerging distinction between private and public spaces as well as from the aspect of design sources. As Americans were defining specialized room uses, new furniture forms and terminologies appeared. Desk-and-bookcases became increasingly common, while references to chests of drawers were replaced by references to bureaus. Sideboards evolved from sideboard tables. Throughout the eighteenth century, existing forms were refined and given specialized nomenclature such as *card table*, *tea table*, *dining table*, and *breakfast table*.<sup>127</sup> In southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina, the furniture form today most commonly called a cellaret developed in the 1760s and was common by the 1780s.<sup>128</sup>

By the early nineteenth century, fashionable dining rooms contained a sideboard on which silver and glassware were displayed. During this same period, cupboards for storage of china were frequently located in dining rooms.<sup>129</sup>

Based on the evidence of both existing objects as well as inventory references, the sugar chest and related forms developed within a relatively short period during this time of increasing specialization. When the demand for sugar storage grew in the early nineteenth century in Middle Tennessee and parts of Kentucky, the innate conservatism of most backcountry cabinetmakers led them to approach

the design of a new form cautiously by using existing forms as a basis for adaptation. A similar pattern occurred in other areas. Henry Glassie, in discussing the development of "architectural sequence" in houses in Middle Virginia, wrote, "New structures are always transformed out of old structures, and even if its design is very complex, the new artifact is the result of melding ideas from old artifacts. The process of design upon which the artifact, whether archaic or novel, depends is one of decomposition as well as composition. Simultaneously, the mind breaks down precepts and builds up concepts."<sup>10</sup>

The analysis of architectural development can also be applied to the development of other artifacts such as furniture. The cabinetmaker had many furniture forms to choose among for adaptation to sugar storage. Most case furniture in Tennessee, like southern case furniture in general, was fitted with locks in order to safeguard valuable objects. Storage forms familiar to the cabinetmaker and his client included chests, bottle cases, desks, bureaus, presses, tables with drawers, and sideboards.<sup>11</sup> In the nineteenth century, sugar was purchased in much larger quantities than previously and thus required more storage space. A bin with a divided interior seems to have evolved from a simple box used to store sugar. Perhaps the idea of a divided interior was the result of the need to be able to safeguard other valuable commodities such as coffee within the same piece of furniture. A box-type storage bin with a divided interior in the form of a case and bottles was already familiar to some Tennessee cabinetmakers and their clients in the early nineteenth century. Not surprisingly, the exterior of the most commonly found form of sugar chest resembles a bottle case.

Desks were also logical forms to adapt for different storage uses. The drawers of a desk provided storage even as its interior served as the "family office."<sup>12</sup> In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, rooms designated as dining spaces frequently were used as offices and contained desks. Placement of a sugar desk in a dining room thus would seem to be a logical and practical combination of uses. This same sort of reconfiguration of storage space is demon-



31. Linen desk, Central Kentucky, 1790–1810. Walnut and walnut veneer, light wood, walnut, and cherry inlay; walnut (drawer supports and interior drawer frames), tulip poplar (linen drawers), ash (apron core). HOA 45", WOA 42", DOA 19 $\frac{5}{8}$ ". *On loan to MESDA, Acc. 3480.*

strated by a linen desk from Kentucky (fig. 31) in which the cabinet doors conceal linen shelves. Figure 32 illustrates the reaches of the cabinetmaker's and his patron's imagination. This unique form from Kentucky combines elements of a sugar desk on frame and a tall chest.

Although tables, presses, bureaus, and sideboards were less frequently used as design sources for sugar storage forms, their adaptation represents a similar reconfiguration of space. While "bureau" primarily represents a new name for an old form, the sideboard was



32. Sugar desk, Central Kentucky, 1790–1830. Cherry with light wood inlay; walnut (drawer sides and backs), cherry (chest back), ash (upper case back, bottom, drawer bottoms). HOA 52 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", WOA 22 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", DOA 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " 2". MRF S-2794.

an invention of the eighteenth century. By the 1770s, some affluent dining rooms in America featured sideboards which differed from sideboard tables in their incorporation of deep drawers and cabinets for storage. Sideboards frequently had bottle drawers and occasionally were fitted with secretary drawers. Presses too were multifunctional. A secretary-press from the Roanoke River basin of North Carolina has shelves in its upper case for china, and a serving slide, a secretary drawer, and linen drawers in its lower case.<sup>133</sup>

Glassie described the work of a vernacular architect as “continuous in planes of place and time.” He further stated, “His innovation is inevitably a truce with time, a compromise in social assertion.”<sup>134</sup> In like manner, the cabinetmakers in Middle Tennessee and Central Kentucky were able to design new forms that in reality were adaptations of existing forms already familiar to both cabinetmakers and their clients with which both cabinetmakers and clients could feel comfortable. In that sense, at least, neither sugar chests nor their related forms were “peculiar to the early days of the South.” Instead, this ingenuous and pragmatic adaptation represents a regional response to a regional need.

#### NOTES

1. This article is in large part a distillation of the author's master's thesis, “Sugar Chests in Middle Tennessee, 1800–1835” (Williamsburg, Va.: College of William and Mary, 1996). While extensive primary documentary research was conducted in Middle Tennessee, the conclusions reached regarding Kentucky are based on secondary documentary research and on analogy to Tennessee. The author wishes to thank the following individuals for their encouragement and assistance with this article: Barbara Carson, Mary Jo Case, Sally Gant, Nathan Harsh, Tommy Hines, Tracey Parks, Jonathan Prown, Brad Rauschenberg, Martha Rowe, Derita Coleman Williams, and of course, John Bivins.

2. This statement is based upon a review of probate records from ten Middle Tennessee counties. Given the similarities in economic and social development in Central Kentucky and Middle Tennessee, it seems logical to assume that a similar pattern is evident in Kentucky.

3. By the thirteenth century in great houses in England, sugar and spices were kept under lock and key in spice cabinets and were doled out in small quantities to the cook. Sara Paston-Williams, *The Art of Dining: A History of Cooking and Eating* (London: National Trust, 1993), 37.

4. Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern Society* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985), 23–24, 31, 108–10, 119–33.

5. Mintz stresses that sugar functioned "as a mark of rank—to validate one's social position, to elevate others, or to define them as inferior" (*Ibid.*, 139).

6. An examination of the account book for Winchester and Cage for the year 1811 provides a great deal of information regarding the types of sugar available for purchase and the prices for different types of sugar, coffee, tea, and spices. Brown sugar was commonly referred to as "Orleans sugar" or simply "sugar." Winchester and Cage Account Book, February to November 1811, private collection; Tennessee State Library and Archives microfilm (copy on file at MESDA). The expensive prices of sugar, coffee, and spices were not unique to Sumner County, Tennessee, or the year 1811. The record of the settlement of accounts in 1818 of the Williamson County estate of Hezekiah Puryear, a storekeeper, listed the price for loaf sugar at 40 cents per pound and of brown sugar at 22 cents per pound. Settlement of the Estate of Hezekiah Puryear, Williamson County (Tennessee), Wills and Inventories, April 1818, Book 2, pp. 136–37. On 31 October 1820 *The Clarion, and Tennessee Gazette*, published in Nashville (Davidson County), Tennessee, reported "wholesale cash prices current, at Nashville" for New Orleans brown sugar as 17 cents per pound; no price was listed for white or loaf sugar.

7. *The New Family Receipt Book* (London: John Murray, 1824), 127.

8. Winchester and Cage Account Book. François André Michaux, *Travels to the Westward of the Allegheny Mountains in the States of Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee* (London, 1805), 156.

9. Settlement of the Estate of Joseph Coldwell, entry for 1824, recorded in June 1826, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, Book 8, p. 560.

10. Henry Bradshaw Fearon, *Sketches of America: A Narrative of a Journey of Five Thousand Miles Through the Eastern and Western States of America* (London, 1818; reprint, Bronx, N. Y.: Benjamin Bloom, 1969), 246.

11. Anita Shafer Goodstein, *Nashville, 1780–1860: From Frontier to City* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1989), 30. Walter T. Durham, *Old Sumner: A History of Sumner County, Tennessee from 1805 to 1861* (Gallatin, Tenn.: Sumner County Public Library Board, 1972), 100.

12. Robert H. White, *Tennessee: Its Growth and Progress* (Nashville: Robert H. White, 1947), 174. Robert Emmett McDowell estimates that there were around sixty steamboats operating between New Orleans and Louisville by 1819. "Kentucky, A Brief History," *The Magazine ANTIQUES* 55 (April 1974):780.

13. Fearon, 246.

14. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese discusses how supplies were typically bought in bulk because of the difficulties of obtaining them on a daily basis and because of the large size of plantation households. *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 118. This phenomenon was not restricted to the South, however. See, for example, Jane C. Nylander, *Our Own snug Fireside: Images of the New England Home, 1760–1860* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 195.

15. The entire allotment was as follows:

1200 pounds of bacon, 300 pounds of beef, 40 barrels of corn, 125 pounds of brown sugar, 30 pounds of coffee, 10 pounds of loaf sugar, and 2 pounds of tea, 400 pounds of flour, 1 pound of pepper, 1 pound of allspice, 1 pound of ginger, 100 pounds ginned cotton, 300 pounds of salt, 5 gallons of vinegar, 2 milch cows and calves, 1 stack of blade fodder, 1 stack of oats, 6 pounds of clean flax, 15 pounds of wool.

Widow's Support to Sarah Owen, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, June 1822, Book 8, p. 110.

Not all widows received such handsome allotments of sugar, however, and some did not receive any sugar at all. For a more complete discussion of provisions for widows, see McPherson, "Sugar Chests in Middle Tennessee, 1800–1835," 36–38.

16. Lowell H. Harrison, "Recollections of Some Tennessee Slaves," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 33 (Summer 1974): 177-78.

17. "An Abode of Sweetness," *The Magazine ANTIQUES* 16 (August 1929): 104.

18. Derita Coleman Williams and Nathan Harsh, *The Art and Mystery of Tennessee Furniture and Its Makers Through 1850* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society and Tennessee State Museum Foundation, 1988), 51.

19. The inclusion of Missouri in this list is based solely on brief statements in secondary sources. See Lois L. Olcott, "Kentucky Federal Furniture," *The Magazine ANTIQUES* 105 (April 1974): 882, note 8, and Jessie Poesch, *The Art of the Old South: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, & the Products of Craftsmen, 1580-1860* (New York: Harrison House, 1983), 199.

20. Williams and Harsh, 51. The daybook, which covers the years 1818 to 1842, is owned by the Haywood County Historical Society, Waynesville, North Carolina.

21. Personal communication, Robert S. Brunk, Asheville, North Carolina, 8 January 1996; personal communication, J. Roderick Moore, Ferrum College, Ferrum, Virginia, 9 January 1996.

22. MRF S-645, Henry D. Green, *Furniture of the Georgia Piedmont Before 1830* (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1976), 77.

23. *Neat Pieces: The Plain Style Furniture of Nineteenth Century Georgia* (Atlanta, Ga.: Atlanta Historical Society, 1983), 6, 126. This catalogue implies that "sugar box" and "sugar chest" were interchangeable terms and includes an object described as a "sugar box" which appears to be a full-size sugar chest with a divided interior. References also were found to "sugar cellars" and "sugar stands."

24. Williams and Harsh, 51.

25. E. Bryding Adams, "Mortised, Tenoned and Screwed Together: A Large Assortment of Alabama Furniture," in *Made in Alabama: A State Legacy*, ed. E. Bryding Adams (Birmingham, Ala.: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1995), p. 194. Personal communication, E. Bryding Adams, Curator of Decorative Arts, Birmingham Museum of Art, January 17, 1996.

One of the sugar chests recorded was said to have been made in Huntsville, Alabama, for use in a stagecoach stop in Lincoln County, Tennessee. This particular sugar chest (cat. no. 3699) has the same basic form as the Tennessee sugar chest illustrated in figure 13, but is larger than most sugar chests. It has a height of 39 1/4 inches, a width of 38 1/4 inches, and a depth of 22 1/2 inches. The large size lends credence to its oral history of use in an inn. Like most Tennessee and Kentucky sugar chests, this example is made of cherry and tulip poplar. Other sugar chests located by the Birmingham Museum follow this pattern as well, although two were recorded which had tapered legs, and some featured walnut and yellow pine. Catalogue of Alabama Decorative Arts, Birmingham Museum of Art.

26. Personal communication, H. Parrott Bacot, Director and Curator, Louisiana State University Museum of Art, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 29 February 1996.

27. John Childress of Davidson County, Tennessee, owned a farm in Alabama. (Inventory of the Property of John Childress, Davidson County Wills and Inventories, June 1830, Book 8, pp. 194-95.) In a letter dated 22 August 1833, Thomas Gale of Murfreesboro (Rutherford County), Tennessee wrote to Josiah Gale in Clinton, Mississippi, "The farmers will be nearly ruined and many are determined to remove to Mississippi next winter. Indeed the spirit of emigration seems almost general." (Gale and Polk Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.) James Patrick discusses this phenomenon in terms of plantation architecture in *Architecture in Tennessee, 1768-1897* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 166-70).

28. Leah Rawls Atkins, "Introduction: Made in Alabama, 1819-1930," in *Made in Alabama*, 15.

29. Personal communication, Jessie Poesch, Professor of Art, Tulane University, New Orleans, La., 29 February 1996; personal communication, H. Parrott Bacot, Director and Curator, Louisiana State University Museum of Art, Baton Rouge, La., 29 February 1996.

30. Swannee Bennett and William B. Worthen, *Arkansas Made: A Survey of the Decorative, Mechanical, and Fine Arts Produced in Arkansas, 1819-1870*, vol. 1 (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1990), 14.

31. Jane Sikes Hageman, *Ohio Furniture Makers: 1790 to 1845*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati: Jane Sikes Hageman, 1984), 33.

32. Betty Lawson Walters, *Furniture Makers of Indiana, 1793 to 1850* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1970), 33.

33. Unfortunately, field research undertaken to date in Kentucky is incomplete. MESDA concentrated its efforts in north-central Kentucky, but did not apply its resources to the area bordering Middle Tennessee. The Shaker Museum at South Union, Kentucky, has done research regarding the furniture made by non-Shakers in the area surrounding South Union, particularly in Logan, Warren, Butler, and Simpson counties. See *Close Ties: The Relationship Between Kentucky Shaker Furniture Makers and Their Worldly Contemporaries, An Exhibition of Antebellum Kentucky and Tennessee Furniture* (South Union, Ky.: Shaker Museum at South Union, 1994). The tentative conclusions reached in this paper regarding sugar chests in Kentucky are based on this limited field research.

34. The following estate records for East Tennessee were reviewed: Greene County Wills and Inventories, 1828-1854; Knox County Wills and Inventories, 1792-1824; Roane County Wills and Inventories, 1802-1836; Washington County Wills and Inventories, 1779-1857; Jonesboro (Washington County) Inventories, 1822-1833.

35. Inventory of the Property of Elihu Embree, Washington County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, January 1824, Book 1, pp. 36-37. Embree, publisher of the *Manumission Intelligencer*, and his brother Elijah owned a substantial iron works in Washington County. Patrick, 33, 61. Eastin Morris, *The Tennessee Gazetteer* (1834; reprint, with a preface by Robert M. McBride, Nashville: Williams Printing Company, 1971), 151.

36. Inventory of Malinda Williams, Knox County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, February 1839, as cited in Williams and Harsh, 137.

37. Williams and Harsh, 51.

38. Morris, 62.

39. She also commented on the incongruity of dining in "a plain house with rough unfinished walls yet furnished in neat and fashionable style—carpets &c &c a most elegant dinner and desert served up in the best style—a complete set of the richest cut glass, french china, handsome plate &c &c" (2 September 1827). Juliana Margaret Conner diary, 10 June to 17 October 1827, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

40. Morris recorded the presence of three cabinetmakers in Huntingdon, two in Paris, one in Dresden, and three in Jackson (pp. 146, 176, 182, 232).

41. Williams and Harsh state that they found frequent inventory references to sugar chests in West Tennessee and record several examples of sugar chests and related forms, including one sugar desk and one sugar press. With the possible exception of the sugar desk, these forms appear to post-date 1825. The comment in Mrs. Conner's diary regarding importation of goods raises the question as to whether the sugar desk attributed to Carroll County was in fact brought to Carroll County from Middle Tennessee.

42. Inventory of the Property of Thomas Bedford, Rutherford County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, January 1805, Book 2, p. 2. Bedford County, formed in 1807, was named in honor of Thomas Bedford.



43. Inventory of the Property of Thomas Hutchings, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, October 1806 and January 1807, Book 3, pp. 135, 146. Inventory of the Property of Lewis Green, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, October 1806, Book 3, p. 138.
44. For a more in-depth county-by-county analysis of the frequency of occurrence of sugar chests in Middle Tennessee, reference is made to McPherson, 108–112.
45. Michaux, 105, 294–95. By West Tennessee, Michaux meant that area west of the Cumberland Mountains encompassing both Middle and West Tennessee.
46. McDowell, 77–8–80. Mills Lane, *Architecture of the Old South: Kentucky and Tennessee* (Savannah, Ga.: Beehive Press, 1993), 12–14.
47. Albert Smith, "History in Towns: Russellville, Kentucky," *The Magazine ANTIQUES* 55 (April 1974):894–95.
48. Michaux, 150, 245.
49. Patrick, 61–102.
50. Anne Newport Royall, *Letters from Alabama on Various Subjects* (Washington, D.C., 1830; reprint, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1969), 21, cited in Patrick, 60.
51. Fearon, 204.
52. Elizabeth A. Perkins, "The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky," *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991):492, 499.
53. Emphasis added. Inventory of the Estate of Lewis Green, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, October 1806, Book 3, p. 138.
54. Anita Shafer Goodstein, *Nashville, 1780–1860: From Frontier to City* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1989), 27–29.
55. Emphasis added. Inventory of the Estate of William Tait, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, August 1816, Book 7, pp. 42–46.
56. Capt. J. E. Alexander, *Transatlantic Sketches, Comprising Visits to the Most Interesting Scenes in North and South America, and the West Indies* (London, 1833; reproduced on microcard, Louisville, Ky.: Lost Cause Press, 1961), p. 106.
- Goodstein described Yeatman and his business partners in the banking firm of Yeatman and Woods as "the most spectacularly successful of all Nashville businessmen" during the period and pointed out that Yeatman's estate was valued in excess of \$500,000 (pp. 35–36).
57. Inventory of the Property of Thomas Yeatman, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, March 1834, Book 10, pp. 277–78.
58. Patrick, 83, 92. Paul Clements, *A Past Remembered: A Collection of Antebellum Houses in Davidson County*, vol. 1 (Nashville, Tenn.: Clearview Press, 1987), 70.
59. Emphasis added. Account of Sale of the Property of John Childress, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, November 1820, Book 7, p. 485.
60. Inventory of the Estate of John Childress, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, March 1823, Book 8, pp. 194–95.
61. See, for example, the inventories of the doctors John Ewing and James Roane, the merchant Thomas Kirkman, and the merchant and banker Thomas Yeatman. Account of the Sale of the Estate of James Knox, September 1826, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, Book 9, p. 35. Account of the Sale of the Estate of May Knox, May 1829, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, Book 9, p. 318. Inventory of the Estate of John O. Ewing, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, September 1826, Book 9, p. 49. Inventory of the Estate of Thomas Kirkman, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, September 1827, Book 9, pp. 128–29. Inventory of the Estate of Robert Buchanan, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, August 1829, Book 9, p. 332. Inventory of the Estate of James Roane, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, August

1833, Book 10, p. 204. Inventory of the Estate of Thomas Yearman, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, August 1834, Book 10, pp. 288–78.

62. For a more complete analysis of this changing pattern of ownership, see McPherson, 119–46.

63. Presumably town residents also owned fewer slaves and had smaller households to support than planters and farmers and thus had need for smaller amounts of sugar.

64. As Barbara G. Carson wrote regarding inventories in Washington, D.C., during the federal period, "Inventories reveal the persistence of traditional performance as well as the lure of gentility and new fashions, especially in urban areas." *Ambitious Appetites: Dining, Behavior, and Patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington* (Washington, D.C.: The American Institute of Architects Press, 1990), 31.

65. Inventory of the Property of Thomas Yearman, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, August 1834, Book 10, pp. 277–78.

66. Edward S. Cooke, Jr., *Fiddlebacks and Crooked-backs: Elijah Booth and Other Joiners in Newton and Woodbury, 1750–1820* (Waterbury, Conn.: Mattatuck Historical Society, 1982), 24.

67. Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Random House, 1993), 51, 95, 120–21.

68. While few inventories were recorded specifically as being prepared room by room, in some instances the ways in which furniture was listed make apparent the room in which an object was kept. The inventory of the property of Elizabeth Harding records, "four feather beds and bedsteads, nine sheets, three yarn Cover lids, four yarn quilts, four Callico Do., five blankets, four Cotton Counterpins, three pillows, four straw beds, one walnut dining table, one square do., one square ash do., one sugar chest, one beau fat." (Davidson County [Tennessee] Wills and Inventories, August 1816, Book 7, pp. 57–58.) The inventory of the property of John Ghotson lists "1 folding table, 1 cupboard, 1 sugar chest, 7 chairs." (Williamson County [Tennessee] Wills and Inventories, October 1817, Book 2, p. 334.)

69. Williams listed his primary occupation as farmer in both the 1850 and the 1870 U. S. Census; however, the inventory of his estate contained the accoutrements of a cabinemaker, including a workbench, a turning lathe, and tools. Inventory and Account of the Sale of the Property of E. W. Williams, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, February 1872, Book 22, pp. 339–43.

70. This sugar chest is unusual in two respects. Its primary wood is fiddleback (curly) maple, rather than the more common cherry or walnut. It also features an atypical drawer arrangement of two-over-two. The lower section of its feet are replaced, perhaps due to degradation from having been set in tins of water or kerosene to repel insects.

71. Levi Cochran Daybook, Good Spring, Benton, Tennessee, 1825–1851. The original of this daybook is owned by descendants; a copy is in the MESDA library.

72. See the Account of the Sale of the Property of Garet Hall, Dickson County (Tennessee) Administrators Settlements, March 1850, Book 2, pp. 424–25. The Dickson County records covered a later period of time than any other probate records reviewed.

73. Some of the boxes of these earlier chests can be removed from their frames; others are permanently affixed. Turned legs are a later stylistic development. The presence of tapered legs does not necessarily indicate earlier manufacture, however, but could indicate either a stylistic preference or the lack of access to a turning lathe.

74. As discussed above, widows' allotments of the period reveal a much higher use of brown sugar than loaf sugar; this higher consumption of brown sugar was probably due to the expense of loaf sugar compared to brown sugar. An 1819 newspaper advertisement also reflects the relative consumption of brown sugar compared to white sugar. Reuben Payne, Dry Creek Warehouse, Davidson County advertised that he had for sale for cash 27,000 pounds of brown

sugar and 1000 pounds of loaf sugar. *The Clinton, and Tennessee Gazette*, 12 October 1819.

75. Middle Tennessee estate inventories of the period provide evidence that sugar was stored in sugar chests. An inventory filed in Williamson County in 1818 listed "one sugar chest and sugar" among the items belonging to the deceased." Inventory of the Estate of Hinchin L. Bass, Williamson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, April 1818, Book 2, p. 374. See also, Inventory of the Property and Account of the Sale of the Property of Thomas Wisen, Sumner County (Tennessee) Inventories and Settlements, May 1816, Book 1, pp. 259–60; and Inventory of the Estate of Francis May, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, April 1818, Book 7, p. 295.

In a lawsuit involving a will contest in Grundy County in 1850, one witness testified that sugar and coffee as well as money and papers were kept in the sugar chest, for it was one of only two pieces of furniture in the house which were kept locked. Testimony of Elizabeth Walker, *Robert Tate v Heirs of James Tate*, Box 91, p. 29, Middle Tennessee Supreme Court Case Files, Tennessee State Museum and Archives, Nashville. Grundy County, located in southeastern Middle Tennessee, was formed from lands in Franklin and Warren counties in 1844.

76. James and Roger Quarles (who were brothers), Captain John B. Quarles (the son of James), and Daniel Trigg (brother-in-law of Roger) were all cabinetmakers in Wilson County in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Andrew Jackson was acquainted with the Quarles family since John B. Quarles served under him in the army and Roger Quarles served on the Cotton Gin Committee of which Jackson was chairman in 1802. MESDA research files. Williams and Harsh, 104–5, 310, 319. Review of files of the Ladies Hermitage Association related to the sugar chest.

77. The inlay on the Jackson sugar chest is more academically inspired and more finely detailed than that on the Quarles desk. The banded inlay at the bottom edge of the case of the sugar chest is the work of a skilled inlay maker. Moreover, the construction of the two pieces is vastly different. The angles of the drawer dovetails on the sugar chest are much steeper, the fit of the joints is tighter, and the pins of the dovetail joints extend further into the drawer front than on the desk. The drawer frames of the desk are substantially thicker than the drawer frame on the sugar chest. Additionally, the drawer bottoms of the desk have a sharp and deep bevel creating the look of a raised panel. The desk examined is illustrated in Williams and Harsh as fig. 63, p. 104.

78. The inventory taken in 1833 after Judge John Overton's death did not list a sugar chest. However, his wife had inherited a sugar chest upon the death of her first husband, Francis May. Figure 13 may be the sugar chest listed in the 1818 inventory of Francis May. After marrying the widow Mary May in 1820, Overton launched a major renovation of his simple two-story, four-room Federal house which he had built in 1799 by adding a two-story, eight-room Greek-Revival ell. Overton purchased some new furnishings during the course of this renovation. While some of the items were locally made, he also obtained glassware, china, and furniture imported to Nashville by his stepson-in-law, Richard Barry. Among these imported items were two dozen wine glasses, one dozen gilt cups and saucers, a mahogany dressing table, and one dozen fancy chairs from Philadelphia. A sugar chest may not have been considered appropriately stylish for these new rooms.

Inventory of John Overton, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, August 1833, Book 10, pp. 192–96. Will of Francis May, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, February 1818, Book 7, p. 220. Inventory of Francis May, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, April 1818, Book 7, p. 295. Paul Clements, *A Past Remembered: A Collection of Antebellum Houses in Davidson County*, vol. 1 (Nashville, Tenn.: Clearview Press, 1987), 110–13. Thomas B. Brumbaugh, Martha I. Strayhorn, and Gary G. Gore, eds., *Architecture of Middle Tennessee, The Historic American Buildings Survey* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt

University Press, 19-41, 106. Fletch Coke, "Profiles of John Overton; Judge, Friend, Family Man, and Master of Travellers' Rest," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 37 (Winter 19-81):408. Williams and Harsh, 29, 47.

79. John Bivins, Jr., *The Furniture of Coastal North Carolina, 1700-1820* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, 1988), 413-14.

80. While more research is needed to identify this cabinetmaker and the specific area in which he worked, the 1820 United States Census for Kentucky lists a Henry Webb in Clark County, Kentucky (located southeast of Lexington). Edna Talbott Whitley records a cabinetmaker by the name of H. H. Webb in Simpsonville (Shelby County), Kentucky in 1859. *A Checklist of Kentucky Cabinetmakers from 1775 to 1859. With Addendum* (Paris, Ky., 1981), 113.

81. Williams and Harsh, fig. 149, p. 140.

82. Personal communication, Tommy Hines, Executive Director, Shaker Museum at South Union, 2 November 1995 and 8 January 1996. Williams and Harsh illustrate a sugar chest of this same form, which they attribute to Montgomery County, Tennessee, located across the state line and immediately southeast of Logan County (Williams and Harsh, fig. 150, p. 141). Sugar chests from West Tennessee follow this pattern as well.

83. Williams and Harsh (p. 137) report the occurrence of sugar chests constructed of maple and birch.

84. [Fortescue] Cuming, *Sketches of a Tour to the Western Country through the States of Ohio and Kentucky: A Voyage down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers; and A Trip through the Mississippi Territory and Part of West Florida* (Pittsburgh, 1810), 164.

Michaux noted the abundance of both walnut and cherry in Tennessee and Kentucky. He stated that the wood of the black walnut tree had a grain "sufficiently fine and compact to admit of a beautiful polish", but went on to say "as its color soon changes to a dusky hue, the Wild Cherry is frequently preferred" for cabinetmaking. François André Michaux, *The North American Sylva, or a Description of the Forest Trees of the United States, Canada and Nova Scotia*, (Paris, 1819), vol. 1, 156-57. He also commented regarding the expense of transporting wood. (*Ibid.*, vol. II, 207.)

85. In 1810, a cabinetmaker in Harrodsburg, Kentucky advertised that he had mahogany available in his shop, and a Nashville artisan made that same claim in 1814. Olcott, "Kentucky Federal Furniture," 8-8; Williams and Harsh, 35.

86. Inventory and Account of the Sale of the Estate of James B. Houston, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, January 1825, Book 8, pp. 436-41.

87. The removable box of this chest is nailed, a further indication of its late manufacture. Others are known which are dovetailed.

88. While acknowledging the variation in the quality of the workmanship ("Some chests show excellent dovetail construction . . . while others are but crudely made boxes set upon unlovely legs."), Dockstader states that most sugar chests were made by "the plantation carpenter or joiner" (141-42). This belief continues to the present day, as expressed to me by the owner of two of the sugar chests illustrated here.

89. Inventory of the Estate of Daniel McBean, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, November 1815, Book 4, pp. 385-88. Inventory of the Sale of the Property of Daniel McBean, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, January 1816, Book 4, pp. 413-20.

90. Cochran Daybook.

91. Ellen Beasley, "Tennessee Cabinetmakers and Chairmakers Through 1840," *The Magazine ANTIQUES* 100 (October 1971):616.

92. Account of the Sale of the Property of Robert Carruthers, Maury County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, 1829, Book D, pp. 433-40.

93. Account of the Sale of the Property of John Motheral, Williamson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, October 1824, Book 3, pp. 743–45.

94. See, for example, Inventory and Account of Sales of the Estate of William Hanna, Sumner County (Tennessee) Inventories and Settlements, February 1830, Book 2, pp. 372–75; Inventory and Account of Sale of the Property of Lewis Barton, Rutherford County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, April 1824, Book 6, pp. 30–35; Account of the Sale of the Property of William Adams, Robertson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, May 1828, Book 6, pp. 505–11.

95. According to Edna Talbott Whitley, this sugar desk has a history of ownership on Clintonville Road in Bourbon County and was bequeathed by the original owner to his granddaughter in 1828. *Checklist of Kentucky Cabinetmakers*, Addendum, p. 3.

96. See the examples illustrated in Olcott, 870–82, and in Keith N. Morgan, “Josiah Reconsidered: A Green County School of Inlay Cabinetmaking,” *The Magazine ANTIQUES* 105 (April 1974): 883–93.

97. MESDA has recorded two other desks with combined uses that do not have fallboard support, a sugar desk (MRF S-2805) and a linen desk (Acc. 3480, fig. 32 here).

98. MRF S-3709. While the feet on Figure 19 also appear to be related, they are apparently a later replacement.

99. This group includes twelve chests of drawers recorded by MESDA, the sugar desk illustrated in figure 22, and one other sugar desk (MRF S-2804). Recent research by Marianne Ramsey and Diane Wachs has revealed the existence of more than ninety objects from this school. The exhibition “The Tuttle Muddle: An Investigation of a Kentucky Case-on-Frame Furniture Group” (Headley-Whitney Museum, Lexington, Kentucky, 30 October to 31 December 1997) highlighted this research. A catalogue of the exhibition is forthcoming.

100. See, for example, the Inventory of the Property of James Akins which lists a sugar desk and the Account of Sales which lists a sugar chest. Robertson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, February 1825, Book 4, pp. 28–32, 286–87.

One known sugar desk constructed primarily of tulip poplar has dovetails joining the front and back to the sides. This joinery method is typical of chests, not of desks which customarily have dovetails joining the top and bottom to the sides. Illustrating this confusion of terminology regarding these forms, this sugar desk recently was described as a “Slant Front Desk, converted from a meal chest.” Ken Farmer Auctions & Estates, catalog for the auction held 28 October 1995.

101. Account of the Sales of the Property of Cornelius Herndon, Sumner County (Tennessee) Inventories and Settlements, February 1819, Book 1, p. 397.

102. Inventory of the Estate of Mary Quarles, Wilson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, June 1823, Book 3, p. 476. However, at the sale of the property of Mrs. Quarles, an entry reflects the sale of a “Shugar Chest”, the “C” of chest being overwritten over a “d.” for \$3.00 (May 1825, Book 3, pp. 521–22). See discussion below regarding confusion of terminology for certain forms.

103. Williams and Harsh, 51.

104. Josiah Nichols file, MESDA Study Collection, MRF S-3201. Joshua Nichols may be the “Josiah Nichols” listed by Edna Whitley as a cabinetmaker in Mercer (later Boyle) County, Kentucky in 1811 (Whitley, 79).

105. Account of the Sale of the Property of Joseph Motheral, Sumner County (Tennessee) Inventories and Settlements, August 1816, Book 1, pp. 295–96.

106. The higher prices commanded at the McBean sale no doubt reflect that the furniture sold was part of the cabinetmaker’s inventory and thus new as compared to the used furniture sold at most estate sales. Account of the Sale of the Property of Daniel McBean,

Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, February 1816, Book 4, pp. 413–20.

107. Even the sugar desk which sold for \$13.25 must have been less significant than a desk, as a “large writing desk” sold at the same sale for \$50.00. List of Sales of the Estate of Robert [M or W] Reynolds, Logan County (Kentucky) Wills and Inventories, January 1805, Book 1, pp. 44–45.

108. See, for example, the inventory of the property of William McGrady which listed both a sugar desk and a desk and bookcase. Sumner County (Tennessee) Inventories and Settlements, February 1816, Book 1, p. 248.

109. John Bivins and Forsyth Alexander, *The Regional Arts of the Early South* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Museum of Early Decorative Arts, 1991), 41.

110. Account of the Sale of the Property of William Dickson, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, November 1816, Book 7, pp. 87–88. Sugar chests sold for \$6.12<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> and \$6.75 at the estate sales of Elizabeth Harding and Robert Edmondson, respectively. Account of the Sale of the Estate of Elizabeth Harding, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, November 1816, Book 7, p. 106. Account of the Sale of the Estate of Robert Edmondson, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, August 1816, Book 7, pp. 64–65.

111. Account of the Sale of the Property of Mary Green, Maury County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, May 1817, Book 1C, pp. 456–57.

112. Inventory of the Estate of Catherine Cotter, Rutherford County (Tennessee) General Records, November 1830, Book 8, pp. 232–33.

113. Inventory of the Estate of Lewis Green, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, October 1806, Book 3, p. 138.

114. Inventory of the Estate of Thomas Kirkman, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, September 1827, Book 9, pp. 128–29.

115. Inventory of the Estate of Thomas Hutchings, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, October 1806, Book 3, p. 135. Inventory of the Estate of Thomas Hutchings, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, January 1807, Book 3, p. 146.

116. Inventory of the Property of Adnah Donnell, Wilson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, February 1832, Book 6, pp. 315–16.

117. Account of the Sale of the Property of Pumal Hearn, Wilson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, December 1831, Book 6, pp. 330–34.

118. Personal communication, Michael Sisk, Shaker Museum at South Union, South Union, Kentucky, 2 November 1995, and Tommy Hines, Executive Director, Shaker Museum at South Union, 2 November 1995 and 8 January 1996.

119. The account of sale also listed two sugar chests which sold for \$8.00 and \$9.00. Inventory and Account of the Sale of the Estate of James B. Houston, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, January 1825, Book 8, pp. 436–41.

120. Williams and Harsh, figs. 160 and 161, pp. 145–46.

121. Thomas Washington of Rutherford County owned “a cupboard and sugar chest” at the time of his death in 1818. The manner in which this cupboard and sugar chest was listed in the inventory identifies it as a single piece of furniture, rather than two objects listed together. (Inventory of the Property of Thomas Washington, Rutherford County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, December 1818, Book 4, pp. 189–92.) The 1826 inventory of the estate of Henry Windrow, also of Rutherford County, listed “One sugar chest and cupboard” although the account of his estate sale recorded that a sugar chest sold for \$7.00. A comparison of the itemization of property in the inventory and account of sale indicates that the cupboard and sugar chest were, in fact, one object. (Inventory of the Estate of Henry Windrow, Rutherford County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, November 1826, Book 6, pp. 234–35. Account of the Sale

of the Estate of Henry Windrow, Rutherford County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, July 1827, Book 7, pp. 74–77.) A “Sugar Press” was sold for \$6.00 at the sale of the property of Robert Crawson of Maury County in 1832. (Account of the Sale of the Property of Robert Crawson, Maury County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, May 1832, Book E, pp. 514–16.) The 1834 inventory of the property of Jeremiah Baxter listed “1 Dish Cupboard & Sugar Chest.” The manner in which the dish cupboard and sugar chest was itemized indicates that this was a single piece of furniture. (Inventory of the Property of Jeremiah Baxter, Maury County [Tennessee] Wills and Inventories, 1834, Book X, pp. 151–52.)

122. Williams and Harsh, 138, 144–45.

123. MESDA research files, KY 2–8.

124. Brock Jobe and Myrna Kaye, *New England Furniture: The Colonial Era* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), p. 144. In his *Cabinet Dictionary* published in 1803, Thomas Sheraton noted that in France a bureau was a small chest of drawers, while in England the term typically referred to a desk with drawers. Thomas Sheraton, *Cabinet Dictionary*, vol. 1 (London, 1803; reprint, New York: Praeger, 1970), 110.

125. Inventory of the Property of J. D. Goodall, Smith County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, April 1830, Book 1827–1832, p. 234.

The 1822 Davidson County inventory of the property of William Perkins listed “one Bureau and Sugar Chest.” However, the account of the sale of his property recorded the sale of a “sugar chest” for \$7.62½, indicating once again the overlapping and confusing terminology of furniture forms. (Inventory of the Property of William Perkins, Davidson County [Tennessee] Wills and Inventories, October 1822, Book 8, pp. 147–48. Account of the Sale of the Property of William Perkins, Davidson County (Tennessee) Wills and Inventories, January 1823, Book 8, pp. 181–83.) Another bureau and sugar chest was inventoried in Davidson County in 1831, and still another in Williamson County in 1833. (Inventory of the Property of John Curnin, Davidson County [Tennessee] Wills and Inventories, February 1831, Book 9, p. 477. Inventory of the Property of Balaam Ezell, Williamson County [Tennessee] Wills and Inventories, October 1833, Book 5, p. 334.)

126. The MESDA research files contain an old photograph of an object catalogued as a “cellarer or sugar chest.” Attributed to piedmont North Carolina, it consists of a lift-top storage bin over a sliding shelf and two drawers (MRF S-1116). The present location of this object is unknown; the author would like to locate it for further examination and photography.

127. Bushman, pp. 51, 95, 120–21. Elizabeth Donaghy Garrett, *At Home: The American Family, 1750–1870* (New York: Abrams, 1990), 64–67, 84–87; Cooke, 25.

128. Bivins, 226–380, passim.

129. B. Carson, 42; Garrett, 78–91.

130. Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), 73.

131. These furniture forms were also forms commonly found in dining or other public rooms.

132. Cooke, 25.

133. MRF S-1924.

134. Glassie, 112.

## Book Reviews

*May We All Remember Well: A Journal of the History and Cultures of Western North Carolina*. Vol. 1. Robert S. Brunk, Ed. Asheville: Robert S. Brunk Auction Services, 1997. Pp. 287; 91 color, 260 black-and-white illustrations, 5 maps, 5 tables. Paper, \$40.00. ISBN 0-9656461-0-6.

An ambitious new journal, in the form of a large-format (9" x 12") paperbound book, has appeared on the southern decorative arts scene. As the title (derived from John Leland's 1835 hymn, "Evening Shade") suggests, its purpose is to contribute "to the general need for documentation of the material and non-material cultures of Western North Carolina" (p. 7), to quote editor and publisher Robert S. Brunk, an Asheville auctioneer with previous careers as a sociologist and woodworker. While this mountainous section of the state is regularly included in Appalachian Studies periodicals, the emphasis of this new publication on western North Carolina's material culture is a welcome contribution.

Especially noteworthy are the book's elegant design, which underscores the merit of the subject matter and generally high level of research, and the diversity of approaches taken to the nineteen-county focus area. The authors of the eighteen essays range from folklorists, art and local historians, a genealogist, and an archaeologist to freelance writers, collectors, and dealers. Each adds a piece to the complex cultural patchwork that constitutes western North Carolina. A number of the more substantial articles concern folk or traditional craftspeople who learned their skills informally within their communities. Kathleen Curtis Wilson begins her study of weaver Allie Josephine ("Josie") Mast of Valle Crucis, Watauga County, with a



surviving homespun suit woven by Josie's grandmother in the 1820s, then uncovers the truth in the stories of Josie's 1913 furnishing of President Woodrow Wilson's White House bedroom as part of her involvement in the Handcraft Revival. The impact of this revival movement on native arts is also explored by Pauline Binkley Cheek in her study of the hooked-rug cottage industry of Madison County, and by Terry B. Taylor in his piece on the Sunset Mountain Pottery, whose wares were promoted in Asheville but made in the Piedmont by the Cole family of Seagrove.

Jerry Israel traces four generations of Mace family chairmakers in Madison County and convincingly links the first to a neighbor who in turn inherited a furniture-making tradition brought from London in the 1750s. Ample illustration is provided for the work of the last two Maces, Copenny and his son Shadrick ("Birdie"), who specialized in mountain "mule-ear" chairs until the Handcraft Revival encouraged them to make ladderback dining chairs, a nonlocal form, in the 1930s. These ladderbacks became Birdie's meal ticket, but that didn't keep him from commenting on the relative comfort of the two types: "Now, if company comes, and you don't want them to stay long, well, you bring out one of them ladderbacks for them to sit on. But if you want 'em to set a spell and visit, well offer 'em a settin' cheer" (p. 192). Israel states that "there seems to be no design precedent for the bent back" of the mountain "settin'" chair (p. 176), but in fact a likely precedent is the northern Hitchcock-style side chair, factory-made in the early nineteenth century and reinterpreted by country chairmakers.

Artists working in a more academic vein in western North Carolina are also documented in *May We All Remember Well*. Peter Austin examines the career of Rafael Guastavino, a Spanish-born builder who refined the Catalan vaulting (layered-tile) technique and applied it to the arches and domes of Biltmore House and Saint Lawrence Catholic Church in Asheville, where he settled. William A. Hart, Jr., writes a biography for another adopted Ashevillean, Japanese-born George Masa, a scenic photographer who helped to

map the Great Smokey Mountains National Park and the Appalachian Trail before his death in 1933. And Andrew James Brunk looks at an 1850 view of Asheville by Robert Duncanson of Cincinnati, a member of the Hudson River School of landscape painters, and ponders on how this nationally recognized African-American artist might have been received while visiting North Carolina, with its laws hostile to free Blacks.

Three artists in wood featured in this journal were largely self-taught, drawing on their own inner visions for inspiration. As Maggie Palmer Lauterer describes, Wade Martin of Swannanoa, Buncombe County, learned basic woodworking and instrument-making skills from his father, noted fiddler Marcus Martin, but went on to develop a distinctive line of carved mountain figures sold through Asheville's Allanstand Craft Shop. Charles G. Zug III reports that Edgar McKillop of Balfour, Henderson County, began carving his blocky animal and human figures about 1926 when he lost his mill job and a neighbor gave him some walnut trees. The inspiration behind the elaborately inlaid woodwork of Ashevillean Samuel Wilson Jacobs is not known, but his 1920s creations seem related to a larger African-American aesthetic, according to Jack L. Lindsey.

Not all the journal's articles concern the visual arts. Rob Amberg, Barbara R. Duncan, and Blanche R. Robertson explore three underpinnings of the Appalachian economy: tobacco, ginseng, and milling. Brett Riggs combines archaeology with archival data to reveal some of the cultural choices of John Christie's mixed-blood Cherokee family prior to their removal from Cherokee County to Oklahoma on the Trail of Tears.

With no apparent limits but those of geography, *May We All Remember Well* offers a refreshingly multifaceted look at the past and present cultures of western North Carolina. Given the book's high production values, its price tag is not unwarranted. Rumor has it that a second volume is in the works.

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Jacob Simon, *The Art of the Picture Frame: Artists, Patrons and the Framing of Portraits in Britain*. London: National Portrait Gallery, 1996. Pp. 224, 89 color, 10 black-and-white illustrations; bibliography, glossary, index. ISBN 1-85514-171-X (cloth, £40), 1-85514-172-8 (paper, £25).

From the earliest times to the present, picture frames have been an important part of every household's belongings. However, the frame as an element of the painting it encases has been overlooked in the traditional study of art, at least until recently, with the publication of Jacob Simon's groundbreaking work on British frames.

In art historical circles, the picture frame has retained the status of a stepchild or even worse, an illegitimate offspring, with no one claiming responsibility for its care, study, or connoisseurship. Few people have ever collected frames, studied them closely, or considered them remotely important to the study of art. Up to this point, there has been only brief research, contained in a bibliography in the front of the book, regarding the stylistic development of the frame and its important symbiotic relationship to the paintings they surround. It is not surprising that as a result of this shortage of information, collectors and curators find selecting appropriate frames a troublesome and frustrating task; they tend to rely on a handful of decorators with no historical perspective.

In this reviewer's experience, the prevailing attitude at world-class museums in this country in the 1970s reflected the status quo: Dump the original frame and put on something that looks good. Paintings were typically re-framed based on aesthetic considerations rather than art historical precedent. There was no history of frames to draw from. Simon's book contributes greatly to the general understanding of a frame as integral to the work of art it surrounds. It will be an invaluable reference for every serious collector for years to come.

The first chapter of the book addresses the important function of the frame as a barometer of taste for each era. For example, early sixteenth-century frames were made with relatively simple profiles and, in comparison with frames made later in the century, were austere painted with minimal amounts of gold leaf applied as an accent.

They were surmounted with a curtain rod upon which an expensive and rare silk, such as taffeta or sarcenet, was hung and then pulled across the painting as a protective and theatrical device. However, in the latter part of the century, the curtain was eliminated and the former austere approach was gradually replaced with an elaborately carved and gilded frame. This shift reflects the broad pendulum of changing taste over the next four hundred years. The chapter ends with a discussion of prevailing attitudes in museums today; it also mentions the demise of the frame in the modern era, suggesting that this is a reaction to the traditional frame calling undue attention to itself. For example, when placed next to an abstract painting like a Piet Mondrian, which is characterized by flat and linear qualities, a traditional three-dimensional frame becomes self-insistent. In order to be successful, the frame must mimic the aesthetics of the painting and become, by default, a silent partner.

The second chapter describes in exquisite detail the techniques of frame making; it provides a cogent basis for looking at and understanding the frames in the subsequent chapters. The methodology of frame making is as varied as the nationalities that practice it, yet there is a common thread that all practitioners of the craft share: the use of gold leaf or another metal as a surface finish, providing a neutral transition between canvas and wall. The many ways of its application are explained as well as the subtle differences that distinguish carved wood, composition ornament, papier-mâché, and other exotic treatments of materials, such as silver leaf covered with a yellow varnish to give the appearance of gold leaf but with a distinctive cool color. The various techniques of gesso work and other surface effects are also described. With a little bit of practice, and using this book as a guide, readers will be able to look at a picture frame and understand what they are seeing.

Classifying frames is a difficult task for any scholar. There are just too many categories of frames, and they rarely fall into neat and tidy slots as art historians want them to do. The frame defies categorization: it is not furniture, sculpture, or architecture, but rather an

amalgam of all three. In spite of this daunting challenge, the author has given us some basic guidelines that can be used until more information is gathered. One shortcoming of the book is that there are not more profile drawings of the frames, as it is difficult to see the shapes of the moldings from photographs alone. Other chapters describe the evolution of various styles of frames that are particular to London and that echo trends in architecture and other decorative arts: Tudor, Charles I, Sunderland, and cushion frames; Baroque, William Kent, Rococo, Carlo Marrata, Neoclassical, and Revival styles. In addition, artist's frames are given a thorough analysis of their own. There is also a chapter on the role of an artist's patrons in selecting frames for their own portraits. Historically, great effort was directed toward presentation by selecting a frame appropriate for the environment for which the work of art was intended and, more importantly, by considering the painting's color, texture, composition, and scale.

The last chapter includes information about the business of frame making, followed by a brief guide to the more significant frames in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery in London. The expense of making a frame or finding an old one that is appropriate is considerable. Today, one can expect to pay many thousands of dollars for a frame that is hand-carved, gessoed with delicate recutting, punchwork or stamping, and finally, gilded and toned to a brilliant yet subtle light refraction and surface depth. Simon calculates the cost of frames in proportion to cost of the paintings and rightly concludes that patrons will always carefully consider the value of a painting before investing a lot of money in a frame. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a frame could cost half as much as the painting of a minor artist. Although unique or elaborately carved frames were priced according to the job, most frames were generally priced by the running foot. Our own clear-headed George Washington ordered a frame molding from Clement Biddle in 1797, writing, "Let it cost a dollar a foot. I do not want high price frames."

At present, the art history communities are coming to the realiza-

tion that picture frames are an important interpretive tool. Often the style and origin of a frame can provide valuable clues to the provenance of a painting that lacks an artist's signature or firm attribution. Not only are frames complementary to and derivative of architectural forms, as mentioned above, but they are often excellent examples of design in their own right. Simon's book not only contains many anecdotal stories and contemporary source material, but also contains an excellent glossary of terms and a series of cross-section drawings outlining major trends in English frame design over the last five hundred years.

We are approaching a time when the proper frame may perhaps once again be considered an object worthy of attention for the average collector. There does exist a small international underground of individuals who realize that a good painting deserves a good frame and a bad painting can be improved with a great frame, but they represent just a fraction of the people that should be aware of this aspect of visual perception. With the new awareness that this long-awaited book brings us comes the need for more information. What are the origins of frame design? How do frames differ between countries, and within different areas of a particular country? These and other questions will one day be answered as the tide of interest advances. While frames are now considered by some as magnificent borders, for others they are still rotten bits of wood surrounding a painting that have to be "dealt with." However, the fact still remains that a frame can have a tremendous impact, either positive or negative, on a painting. The American artist William Glackens once remarked, "Every artist suffers from a chronic lack of suitable frames." With the publication of this book, we suffer one bit less from a chronic lack of information about these magnificent borders.

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